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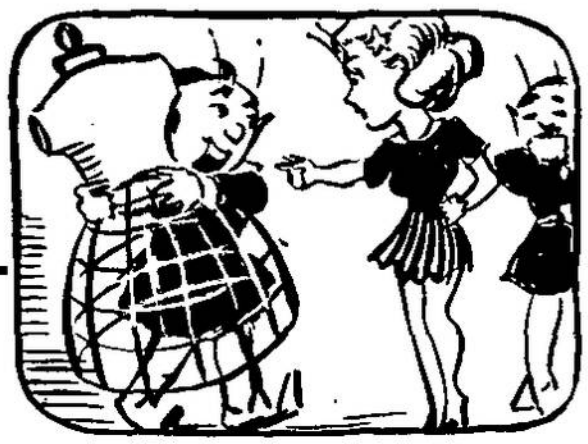

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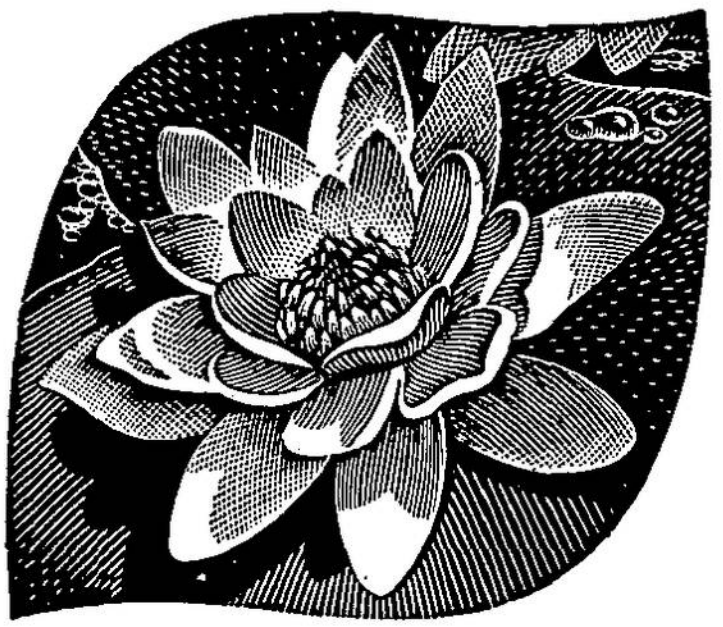

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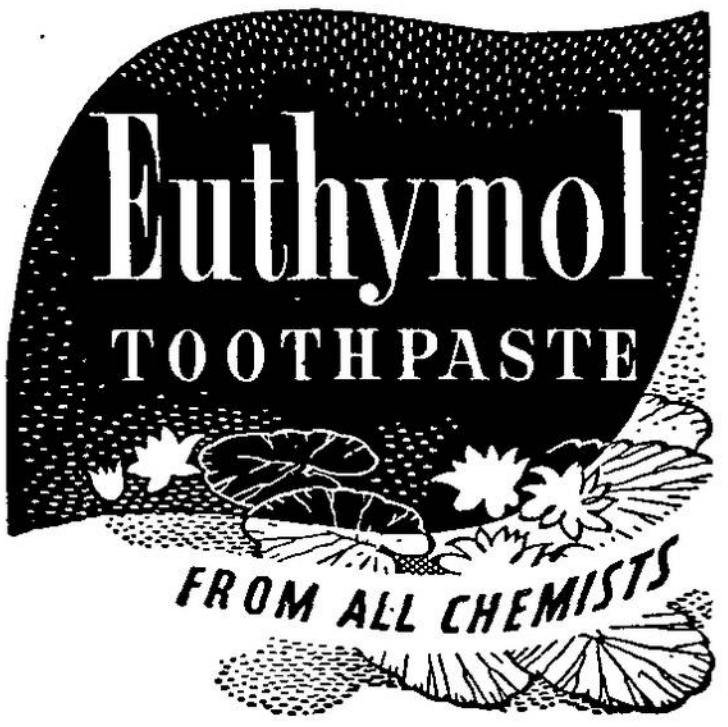

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P729A

ARGOSY

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Come Wind, Come Weather

THERE is a peculiar delight, which I can still experience though I knew it best as a boy, in cosily reading about foul weather when equally foul weather is beating hard against the windows, when one is securely poised between the wind and rain and sleet outside and the wind and rain and sleet that leap from the page into the mind.

The old romancers must have been aware of this odd little bonus of pleasure for the reader, and probably that is why so many of their narratives, to give them a friendly start, began with solitary horsemen, cloaked to the eyebrows, riding through the night on urgent business for the Duke, sustained by nothing more than an occasional and dubious *ragout* or pasty and a gulp or two of sour wine (always fetched by surly innkeepers or their scowling slatterns), on side-roads deep in mire, with wind, rain, thunder-and-lightning, sleet, hail, snow, all turned on at the full.

With the windows rattling away and hailstones drumming at the paper in the fireplace, snug in bed except for one cold elbow, I have travelled thousands and thousands of mucky miles with these fellows, braving the foulest nights, together crying "Bah!"

J. B. PRIESTLEY

THE GLAD YEARS

The stallion had become a symbol—of a buoyant, merrier way of life

by JOHAN BOJER

SKOBELEF was a horse.

That was in the days when the church bells on a Sunday morning sent out their summons, not over moribund highways and slumbering farmsteads, but over a parish waiting to be wakened into life by the sustained, solemn calling of those brazen tongues. The bells rang and rang, until the sky resounded.

The roads grew black with people on their way to church, some walking, some riding. Old codgers wheezed past, stick in one hand, hat in the other, their coats under their arms, and their grey home-spun trousers tucked into boots shiny with grease. The women trundled along carrying shawls and hymn-books, and scenting the breeze with their perfumed handkerchiefs. Out on the lake, bordered with hills and farms, appeared rowing boats driven over the water by sturdy oarsmen; from across the fjord swept the sailing boats; far up in the mountains it seemed as if even the cattle stopped grazing; and the boy who was watching them put the goat-horn to his lips and blew a stout blast down towards the folks at home. In those times Sunday was both holy day and holiday.

Looking back after these many years, I have a vivid impression that all the world was sunshine and green forests on a day like that. The old church, brown with tar, standing amidst the crowns of mighty trees, seemed then to be more than just a building; there was something supernatural about it, as if it knew all there was to be known. Many hundreds of years had passed over it. It had seen the dead when they were still alive, when they went to church like ourselves.

The surrounding graveyard was a little village of wooden crosses and stone slabs; and the grass grew wild between the leaning monuments. We knew well enough that the sexton mowed it and fed it to his cows; so that when we got a drink of milk at his house we felt as if we were quaffing the very souls of the departed, a kind of angelic milk from which we drew transcendental virtues with every draught.

We boys used to stand outside the church and do as our elders did—size up the people that arrived after us. We judged by appearances, and they all knew it. The cripple made himself look smaller than ever so as to hide in the crowd; the dandies ran the gauntlet of both friendly and unfriendly eyes, and pretty women looked down and smiled. We youngsters searched the gathering throng for someone to admire, some heroic figure we should like to resemble when we ourselves one day should be grown up.

There was the new teacher, for instance, stalking along with his homespun coat buttoned tightly, wearing a white necktie, and top hat, and carrying an umbrella. He was at least one stage above the farmer. Without a doubt, we, too, were going to attend the normal school. So we thought, at any rate, until a butcher came up from the city, wearing a suit of blue duffle, a white waistcoat with a gold watch-chain, cuffs, a dazzling white collar, and a straw hat. He was a perfect revelation. With such an exemplar before us it was easy to decide that we were to become butcher's apprentices as soon as we were old enough.

Many were the magnates that paraded through our day dreams. Still it was with no ordinary emotion that we laid eyes for the first time on a city lawyer. His was a truly royal presence. Even his nose had its appropriate ornament, a pair of gold eye-glasses. Our ambitions soared beyond all bounds. Whatever our hopes of higher education might be, most of us were bent on carrying our studies far enough to impair our vision and so to justify the use of gold-rimmed glasses.

Then came Skobelef. And Skobelef was a horse.

For weeks busy little feet had been bringing the tidings to all corners of the parish. Peter Lo had bought a registered stallion that was not simply a horse but a whole Arabian Nights' entertainment. It took six men to lead him ashore from the steamer. Only one man could have turned the trick alone, and that was Peter Lo himself. For the most part the horse walked on his hind legs. He kept whinnying even in his sleep. He was so fierce that he had already killed a number of men. His name was Skobelef.

And what do you suppose they fed him on? It was neither hay nor oats; not even bran! Skobelef's fodder was nothing less than eggnog—made with whisky. It was common talk that Peter Lo and the stallion munched this provender together out of the same crib. They both required stimulants.

To return to that particular Sunday—we were standing at the church keeping an impatient lookout across the parish. Peter Lo was bound for the house of worship driving none other than Skobelef himself.

The long line of vehicles came rolling in from the valleys. It picked up reinforcements at every crossroad until it was like a regular bridal procession. That day we kept our eyes on the horses and estimated the people in the gigs according to their dumb, driven cattle. A whole fated universe passed in review, animals fat and lean, jaded and fiery, old big-bellied nags with long necks and prominent backbones and heads sagging with each step towards the ground under the burden of unceasing tribulation; prosperous looking brutes that gave manifest proof of good crops and bank deposits. Look at that brood-mare; she has weaned many a colt and therefore carries her head high and surveys the world with maternal eyes.

Here and there you can pick out fjord ponies with ragged haunches, stamping against the grade and sweating with the weight of the heavy gig, some of them so small that they make you think of mice. There comes a big old bay with huge watery eyes and quivering knees, looking about as if to ask why there is no Sabbath for the likes of him. Don't miss the physiognomies of those virtuous, censorious fillies proclaiming the vanity of vanities, and just behind them wild young gallants neighing at the world in general. Have a look at that bay gelding. Why is his belly all spattered with mud? That's easy. He is from a mountain farm; early this morning he had to wade through heath and marsh, across brooks and rivers on the way to the parish below, where his master could borrow a cart. He has another tough time coming before he gets back home. Talk about long processions!

But what has become of Peter Lo? Where is Skobelef?

At last, there comes someone driving behind all the others. He is still far away beyond the farmhouses. Never mind, he is gaining ground at a pretty smart pace. Hundreds of eyes are fixed in rapt attention.

The church bells ring out. Most of the horses have been unhitched and tied to the big ash trees; there they stand with their heads buried in bags of hay, grinding at their dinners and gazing absently about. All of a sudden they jerk their heads up, and even the most raw-boned skates arch their necks as they stare down the road.

Enter Peter Lo. Enter Skobelef.

He came trotting along before the gig, a broad black hulk, his fetlocks dancing, his mane sweeping in billows down his neck, his eyes shooting fire, two red prize ribbons waving at his ears. He raised his head and sniffed the breeze, monarch of all he surveyed; then he let out a trumpet call that fetched the echoes out of the mountains.

In the gig sat Peter Lo, holding the reins loosely; he was a genial man of about thirty, with broad shoulders, and a smile at the corner of his mouth just above his chin-whiskers. It was certainly too bad that his wife, sitting beside him, was so much older than he; her every feature drooped, her red cheeks drooped, her eyes drooped, the corners of her mouth drooped; and she always spoke in whimpering tones.

As for Peter Lo himself, he had a weakness for all things pretty, even for such as were not his own. As Skobelef neighed to his affinities, Peter Lo glanced at good friends among the crowd and smiled. Skobelef came to a stop, but got a cut of the whip; he reared and got another stroke; then he bounded up the road towards the parsonage, the crowd in his wake, and we boys flying ahead like birds on the wing.

It was a circus to watch Peter Lo manœuvre Skobelef out from the shafts of the gig and over towards the stable door. Peter Lo certainly looked elegant that day; the horse must have lent him a new dignity; his grey suit was well brushed and he wore a stiff hat just like the teacher's. But every now and then his polished boots flew up in the air.

The crowd stared for all they were worth. Too soon the magic horse disappeared behind the stable door; presently Peter Lo came out again, brushing the horse hairs from his hands. He picked his way carefully so as not to soil those shiny boots as he walked down to the church. The crowd trekked after him. Peter Lo mounted the steps to the hall and walked in, with the congregation following at his heels. Peter Lo sat down in one of the pews, opened a hymn book, and began to sing. The congregation did likewise, and the singing rose in volume.

But on this particular day we youngsters kept watch and ward outside the stable door. It was a mighty good thing it was locked; there was no telling what Skobelef would do if he got loose on his own account. The cold chills ran down our spines as we heard him rattling his halter and stamping on the floor. Now and again the walls shook with his neighing, while we stood there, our heads together, and spoke in whispers.

It was a great day for the horses, too. The mares under the ash trees lost their appetites and stood all the while arching their necks and trying to look like two-year-olds. Stallions and geldings had that day caught sight of a rival whose eyes flashed with arrogance. Do you suppose they would put up with that sort of thing! They pawed the ground furiously and shook the air with protests from all sides.

At last the bells rang again. The congregation came out, but the greater number had no thought of hitching up their own horses. The

yard was jammed with people wanting to see Peter Lo lead Skobelef out of the stable.

The man himself approached. The eyes of all watching him, he strolled along talking to the sexton as if he were an ordinary mortal. Yet he had already acquired certain of the gestures that the parson was accustomed to make use of in the pulpit.

The people gradually drew back from the road. One circumspect man dragged his gig away from the middle of the yard. The women took refuge on the landings of the barns. It was just as well to be on the safe side, but everybody wanted to see what was going on.

Peter Lo unlocked the stable door and disappeared from view. A seven-fold thunder of neighing sounded from within, the halter rattled, heavy hoofs drummed against the floor, and the next minute a black barrel of a body appeared on the threshold.

Skobelef flung his battle-cry to the four winds; Peter Lo was hurled aloft, but landed on his feet some distance out in the yard. Women shrieked. Old men jumped out of the way, hats flying right and left. Peter Lo and Skobelef started to dance around the yard. Skobelef snorted and foamed so that his dark body was dappled with froth; he had no mind to be led towards the gig; he reared, pummelled the air with his hoofs, and plunged from side to side, while a pair of shining boots kept cutting strange capers through space.

It was an apocalyptic vision, something to dream about. The yard was swept clean of vehicles and people in a trice. It had been changed into a ball-room for Peter Lo and Skobelef. Peter Lo yelled Peter Lo.

On went the dance. Finally Skobelef seemed bound to enter the parsonage and have a chat with the preacher's wife; but Peter Lo got ahead of him and planted his splendid boots with a resounding thump against the steps, so that Skobelef succeeded only in tearing down the railing. Peter Lo grew red in the face. Skobelef's whole body had become a mass of foam. The women gasped out shivering sighs, "Oh, oh!"

At last the wild beast was forced between the shafts. As the reins were loosened he rose on his hind legs, and the lash fell on his neck; he pranced about on all fours with arched neck and flaring nostrils. Then Peter Lo's wife came up, and gathering her shawl around her shoulders, she stepped calmly into the gig while the earthquake was still going on.

Now Peter Lo knew that the victory was his; he put his hand on the dashboard and leaped up beside his wife; the horse reared, his eyes shot fire, the foam flew, the whip cracked, and the next second the whole show dissolved in a cloud of dust rushing along beyond the farmhouses.

We stood rooted to the spot. The other men began bashfully to

hitch up their own horses. There was really nothing at all left to look at.

From that day Skobelef was an influential personality throughout the parish. To tell the truth, Peter Lo and Skobelef took on together a sort of higher individuality that drew the popular gaze as they flashed by. It seemed as if they were whipping the whole neighbourhood up to a more rapid tempo. The farmers came to be men of honour so far as their horses were concerned, fed them well, and groomed them with the utmost care. They drove at a brisker pace along the roads, their speech acquired an added dash of humour, they laughed in the face of heaven and earth, their thoughts assumed a new boldness.

On Sundays, as the congregation stood outside the church admiring Skobelef and Peter Lo, a fresh source of vitality seemed to be manifesting itself; men saw with their own eyes the very embodiment of animal spirits, they sensed something venerable in brute strength, they caught the chanted praise of rippling muscles. It began to dawn on them that life is not merely a medley of sins and sorrows, but that life on earth has a glory of its own.

As time passed, Peter Lo gave increasing attention to his clothes. He took to reading books, to wearing a white collar, to using a handkerchief when he blew his nose about the precincts of the church. He imitated the squire's mannerisms of speech. He knew quite well that he and Skobelef had become the local cynosures; and this persuasion lent him a feeling of responsibility and a desire to serve as a pattern for the herd.

If the truth must be told, it was not only we boys who prayed, "Good Lord, help us to be like Peter Lo when we get big!" By no means! The grownups, too, tried to ape his manner. "You are brushing your shoes just the way Peter Lo does," one man would say to another. "And you are wearing a white collar, just like Peter Lo's," they would say.

Skobelef, imported to ennoble the rural breed of horse flesh, had become a spiritual force, an educational institution for the entire countryside.

Peter Lo was not quite so fortunate. He could not be happy except in the society of the stallion. He lost interest in work. He was in his element only when racing down the county roads behind his crony, or when he and Skobelef together conducted revival services beneath the very walls of the church. The rumour spread that he had taken to sleeping in the stable. Gossip would have it that horse and man were coming to resemble each other. Skobelef smiled out of the corner of his mouth when he met with his affinities, and Peter Lo greeted good friends at church with something like a whinny in his voice.

Peter Lo's lot was not altogether enviable. He had a fondness for all pretty things, not excepting those that belonged to his neighbours. And when he got into an unusually bad scrape, he made a most pathetic figure. Then he would go to church and take holy communion. Many a time we saw him come driving, not the wild stallion but an old mare. His sour-visaged wife, wrapped in her shawl, would be sitting in the cart, at one side of which walked the sexton, and at the other side Peter Lo, with bowed head. On such a day he would have his mind made up to listen to the sermon with folded hands and not once to glance in the direction of the women's pews—afterwards he would step forward to the altar and partake of the sacrament. These penitential pilgrimages occasioned more than one good laugh. "Peter's in trouble again," people would say.

A day or two later you would see him tearing down the highway with Skobelef. So he kept on laying up stores of gaiety and æsthetic appreciation of the beautiful, until his conduct became more reprehensible than ever. His wife insisted upon Skobelef's deportation from the farm; it was impossible to convert Peter to virtuous ways so long as he maintained a companionship of that sort.

Meanwhile, round about in the parish there grew up a numerous race of black, prancing horses, and the wheels rumbled faster on all the roads. A whinnying joy of life took sovereign possession of the community. Men lifted up their heads and cast jovial eyes on their surroundings, women plucked up courage actually to laugh out loud, and young folks discovered anew the pleasures of the dance.

But Skobelef was not to reach old age. He broke out of the stable one night and ran off in the mountains to find his affinities, who were accustomed to graze there during the summer.

When Peter Lo came along and saw the empty stable, he started to shout; he evidently suspected at once that misfortune had stamped her mark upon his brow. He had a pretty shrewd idea where his comrade had fled; and witnesses reported that the whole day long they heard Peter Lo tramping over the hills neighing just like Skobelef, calling and coaxing his old friend.

At last he found him. Skobelef was standing up to his neck in a marsh far off in the foothills. He had fought so hard to extricate himself that he had broken one of his forelegs, out of which protruded splinters of bone.

Peter wiped his friend's eyes with a tuft of grass and gave him a raw egg and a shot of whisky. For a little while he let his own tears roll, but finally there was nothing to do but to draw his knife.

After that day Peter Lo drove more slowly along the roads. His head bent lower and his whiskers turned grey.

Now he is an old man; but he still dresses better than most of his neighbours and affects a city brogue as before. When someone reminds him of Skobelef, his eyes grow dim. "Yes, yes," he replies; "Skobelef was not like other horses. He was a regular high school; he taught us all a thing or two."

* * *

PENNY PLAIN

A gallery of those whose faces by no means were their fortune! Allow one point for recognizing the character concerned, one for the source, and one for the author in each case, making twenty-seven in all. Twenty-one rates distinction, eighteen very good, and twelve for a pass. The answers are on page 108.

1. *Her face, not a particularly handsome one, was red and weather beaten . . . But her dress was extraordinary. It was cut very low with short skirts, in black and yellow . . . And she wore, attached by a broad black ribbon, a single eye glass!*
2. *"If it had grown up," she said to herself, "it would have made a dreadfully ugly child: but it makes rather a handsome pig, I think."*
3. *O fat white woman . . .!*
4. *His figure was large and well formed, and his countenance of the cast of an ancient statue . . . He had the use of only one eye . . . When he walked, it was like the struggling gait of one in fetters; when he rode, he had no command of his horse, but was carried as if in a balloon.*
5. *I have seen roses damask'd, red and white,*
   But no such roses see I in her cheeks.
6. *"But no!" I said. "... You mun marry a girl like a lily. See, I be hare-shotten!"*
   But he wouldna listen. He wouldna argufy.
7. *His complexion was dull and yellowish. He was, in the technical sense of the word, clean-shaven, with a small fallow patch under the right ear . . . His brow had the little puckerings of a thoroughly discontented man, little wrinklings and lumps . . . Perhaps after all it was not simply indigestion that troubled him.*
8. *Her younger sister was beautiful and well-favoured; but her only assets were her tender eyes, and her reluctant husband!*
9. *Upon the top of his nose he had a wart, and on it stood a tuft of hairs, red as the bristles of a sow's ears . . .!*

CHOICE

The mountain at least was honest, and its beauty could not be bought

by JOHN WEILLS

TOBIN stood on the terrace of the small hotel and watched the last light of day touch the peak of the mountain. The sun caught the snow-plume as it trailed off the cap, and the diaphanous veil was filled for a beautiful moment with myriad points of brilliance. The summit was savagely alone and unsupported for one magnificent second, then abruptly faded into a softer relief against the darkening sky.

Well, tomorrow would tell the story. Tomorrow and the next day. He'd know then if his fear of the mountain would live in him forever or if he were rid of it.

Beside him, a voice said, " It is a mountain, Monsieur Tobin."

Franz' weathered face was lifted towards the summit. In his eyes were the memories of many assaults upon the peak.

" No one has been up ? " Tobin said.

Franz shook his head. " Not the east face. No one." He turned to the hotel, his wide, stocky body a solid shape in the deepening shadows. " I will call you. We must start early."

Tobin said, " All right. Sleep well, Franz."

The man was gone, and Tobin looked upwards once more. The mountain now thrust its great shoulders towards the first stars, and beauty was no part of the black and evil mass. He walked to the house in the first chill of night.

The central room of the inn was softly lighted, and against the far wall the fireplace was alive with leaping warmth. Rosa Karns sat to one side, the light playing gently upon her face, her long legs stretched towards the blaze. Opposite her was Corseti, his white teeth gleaming in a lean, dark face.

The woman was tall, her blonde-and-copper slimness alive even in repose. The face was high-cheekboned, full-mouthed, and now the eyes turned to him. The green eyes that were cool and amused and measuring. " Ah, Monsieur Tobin. Looking at your mountain again ? " The low voice bit into him like a spur. It was difficult to believe he'd known this woman for only two days.

" Yes," he said. " Looking at the mountain."

It had been in his thoughts, in his dreams, for more than ten years. For the last week he had been looking at it. Tomorrow he would meet it again.

Corseti rose. The man was tall, broad-shouldered and lean. "You have been here for a week?"

"That's right," Tobin said. He'd been acclimatizing himself, taking the lesser climbs. He was giving himself every chance.

"You're not an impatient man," Corseti said. He spoke French with a marked Italian accent. The woman's accent—Tobin had tried but could not identify it.

"It doesn't pay to be impatient with this one," Tobin said. "I've been here before."

Corseti's eyebrows lifted. "You climbed it?"

Tobin shook his head. "There was an accident." *He remembered how Thomson's body had come down through the high chimney, the arms and legs flailing. He recalled Thomson's long cry, the sound of the impact as the body struck.*

Corseti paced across the room, and the woman's eyes followed him. He said, "I have examined it. Through the glass, of course. I can see a certain amount of difficulty. Not too much for a really experienced man."

Tobin said, "Of course not. No trouble at all." He was angry with Corseti because of Corseti's attitude about the mountain, but he knew the woman was part of it, too.

Corseti said, "I have been on them all, and in the East, the really big ones. This one is nothing."

Tobin said, "Last year it killed Reissmann. The year before, Reed-Horton. But it's nothing. Merely a hill. No trouble at all."

Rosa Karns said, "It puzzles me. The mountain has killed several men. Why attempt it? What is gained?"

Corseti looked at her. "Why does a man reach for a truly beautiful woman when there are so many he could have more easily? Part of it is the beauty itself. Part is the challenge, the knowledge of the difficulties involved." His eyes did not move from Rosa Karn's face as he spoke.

Tobin considered what Corseti had said. He wasn't far wrong. Tobin could add nothing to it himself.

"So you start in the morning, Monsieur Tobin," Rosa Karns said. "You will be the first to climb this east face?"

"Yes, with luck," Tobin said. The tone of her voice puzzled him. But the unspoken laughter in it was not directed at him. He glanced at Corseti. The man's face had hardened.

Corseti said, "If the other guide were not in Zermatt, I, too, would be leaving in the morning."

Tobin looked at him. "You're welcome to come, Corseti.

A party of three would be better."

"But then," the woman said, "this senseless business would have no point at all, would it? You would be together, and the element of the contest would be lost."

"I will wait." Corseti bit the words out, the faint trace of a sneer twisting his lips.

Tobin shrugged. He arose and threw his cigarette into the fireplace. "I'll say goodnight. I have to be up early."

Rosa Karns came to her feet in a liquid movement. "I, too, am tired. Goodnight, Monsieur Corseti."

Corseti looked at her, bowed slightly but did not speak.

Tobin and the woman went up the stairs together. Her arm brushed him, and the contact was electric. She said, "And when this is done, you will return to your country?"

"Yes. I haven't much time left."

"I would like to see England," she said. Her eyes looked into his own and said much more than her words. "It must be charming. So beautiful, so safe."

He said, "It's not bad at all." They walked down the corridor to her room. Her hand on the knob, she turned.

"Two days will be a very long time." The expression in her eyes could mean anything, and her nearness was a heady potion.

"They'll pass quickly," Tobin said.

"Do you have to go?" she asked. Her voice was low. "Let the other one climb. He is nothing. Only a fool. A fine animal without enough brains to be afraid. He will climb all the mountains of the world in record time. All the cold, hard, unrewarding mountains."

She was in his arms then, soft and pliantly alive, her breath warm and sweet on his mouth, and for a moment he stopped thinking. Stopped thinking of the mountain, of Corseti, of anything that had ever been of importance. He heard someone ascending the stairs and broke away, feeling stupid and awkward.

"In two days," he said.

She shrugged lightly, with a resigned and amused gesture. "Good luck," she said. Her door closed behind her.

His search for sleep was a difficult one. The woman's appeal was primal yet refined to the ultimate degree. She puzzled and disturbed him. Somehow, she had created a hostile note between him and Corseti. Her eyes, her mouth, perhaps her very existence, had set them against each other.

He awoke in the dark, with Franz' hand on his shoulder. He dressed with care, went down and had breakfast in the kitchen of the inn. Franz had laid out their packs on the floor. Everything

they would need was there.

Tobin finished eating and they went out into a darkness tinged with grey in the east. The outline of the mountain was discernible above them. He remembered the last time. Thomson had been with them, then. Now, it was fear, a shadow that trailed him lightly. Franz and he and fear, and the persistent thought of the woman.

The early part of the trip, over gently rising ground, gave no trouble. That would come when they reached the glacier in two hours. This was a pleasant walk through fading darkness.

"The new arrival," Tobin said. "Corseti. He's anxious to get started."

"Marcel is in Zermatt," Franz said. "He will be back today or tonight. They can start in the morning."

"He's never been here before."

Franz nodded. "He might make it. He is one of the great ones. He should have come with us. It would have been better for us all."

Tobin said puzzledly, "One of the great . . ." and then he had placed the name. Corseti! Of course. He had been a fool not to recognise it. Corseti, who had been the leading force in the Polish ascent of Nanda Devi, in 1939. The significance of the name had completely escaped Tobin.

They climbed easily and swiftly. Franz' pace was constant and distance-eating. They were an hour on their way before they paused to smoke.

Franz lit a pipe, Tobin a cigarette. Franz said, "Monsieur Thomson—you saw his family?"

"Yes, I saw them." He'd accompanied the body home, had said the expected and futile things to Tommy's parents. Ten years ago, and the pain was still intense.

And now he said again, as he had said the day it happened, "Franz, was it my fault? Could I . . ."

"No," the guide said. "You are not to think that. You tried and could not make it. Monsieur Thomson was unwise. You saw what he did. He had much courage, but he was not wise."

No, he had not been wise, but perhaps, Tobin thought, if he himself had tried just a bit harder, Tommy wouldn't have been forced to pay such a price for his lack of caution.

When they were on their way again Franz said, "We do not stop until the glacier. We have no time to spare."

An hour later, when it was barely full dawn and the sun had not yet made its appearance, they came to the edge of the glacier. Conditions were ideal. No warmth had as yet touched this frozen

terrain. They adjusted crampons and roped up, and with Franz in the lead, started the crossing.

It was work that required every ounce of concentration, and Tobin lost himself in it. The progress Franz made was steady, if slower, than before. Each step had to be tested, and some cut into the ice, before they could proceed. But the guide had known the glacier from his childhood. His instinct for its traps and pitfalls was unerring.

They crossed an ice-bridge that, when the sun touched it an hour later, would be unsafe. Franz went over first, Tobin belaying the rope with his ice-axe, inserted deeply into solid snow. Tobin followed him, and for a moment he looked down into the bottomless crevasse of blue, cold shadow.

They fought their methodical way across and up the ice, and in three hours reached the *bergschrund*, the large crevasse just beneath the rocks at the head of the glacier. This they traversed for a mile, and suddenly Franz grunted as they reached a jutting ice cornice.

It was a jump of perhaps six feet over gaping nothingness, and they made it in turn. Safely on the rock of the mountain itself, Franz said, " And now, something to eat and a smoke."

They had sandwiches and water, and lying on the now-warming rock, Tobin felt the growing exaltation that was so intrinsically a part of the climb. The terrible beauty of the glacier had been one phase of it, and this part, the real ascent, would be the second and more powerful. Soon he would not be looking up to the heights but down upon the world. The glacier would be a ribbon of snow and ice at his feet.

They climbed, alternating in the lead. Tobin's experience and his love for the sport had given him a skill that matched the guide's in most respects. They worked their way upwards through the forenoon, the sun beating down on them, the packs seeming heavier.

At noon they rested on a ledge that was part of a high, barren face. Above them was an overhang, the rock bulging out at an impossible angle. The only route was a lateral traverse to the right that would take them from under the overhang and permit vertical movement once again.

Franz said, " Reissmann fell here."

It was an appalling face, but Tobin had crossed it twice before in the past, and he remembered every handhold, every niche into which a man could put his foot.

He inched along the sheer wall, and at intervals of several yards, where opportunity permitted, he drove pitons into infinitesimal cracks in the rock, snapped on carabiniers, ran his rope through the rings and proceeded. At one point he rested and looked downwards.

There was a sheer drop of two thousand feet to the glacier below. He averted his eyes with an effort and continued on, beyond the overhang. In fifteen minutes he could climb again, and a few moments later he was on a respectable ledge. Franz followed him, retrieving what pitons he could, and they ate again, high in the noon sun, the world stretched out at their feet.

"Three, maybe four hours more," Franz said, "and we rest for the night."

They went up a narrow ridge that was good for several hundred feet. It ended in a towering cliff, and Franz went up the face like a patient fly. Tobin sent up the packs on a rope to Franz and followed.

They were confronted by a short overhang, and Franz said, "*Courte échelle.*" He stooped, and Tobin carefully mounted to his shoulders, then stretched upwards, seeking for the handhold he knew was there. He found it in a moment and pulled himself upwards, his body clinging to the rock like a piece of steel to a magnet. He hauled up the packs, then belayed a rope about a jutting shoulder of rock while Franz ascended.

The day was almost done, here on the mountain's east face. Night would be on them soon and there was no time to waste. Another hundred feet up, and on a small table under the rock face, they found sanctuary of a sort.

It was a spot protected from the wind and roofed by a gigantic boulder which centuries before had fallen and become wedged into place. Here, too, someone had established a cache, for this was the last refuge before the final assault. There were sleeping bags in hollow aluminium tubes, tinned and dried food and an emergency medical kit. Franz took nothing from these stores, but added to them from their supplies.

He said, "Ten days I was here once. A storm. We could not move."

After they had eaten, Tobin again sat looking down on the world below. The philosophy of climbing seemed a simple thing. The beauty observed and the emotions experienced were beyond comparison.

They sat for a little while in the growing darkness, reviewing the climb and planning the final assault; but there was little pleasure in it. Bitter memory and the brassy taste of fear were still with him.

He took his mind from that rotten, widening chimney he'd have to face in the morning and thought of the woman. He said to Franz, "Mademoiselle Karns. She does not climb?"

Franz took his pipe from his mouth. "Ah, Mademoiselle Karns. No, she has never been interested in climbing."

Tobin looked at him in surprise. "Never been interested? You mean she has been here before?"

Franz nodded. "Several times." He puffed on the pipe for a moment. "In 1942 with a German general. In 1946 with a Russian of some importance. Yes, she visits us upon occasion." His eyes were on Tobin, and in them was both amusement and compassion.

Tobin digested it slowly. Well, it wasn't really a shock. He'd known she hadn't come here directly from a convent. No woman could have that poise without much experience. Such beauty as hers was not for one man.

"She is a type," Franz said. "We have heard there are many people who would like to ask questions of her—if they could find her!"

All right. The truths were coming out, now. An opportunist. But who was not? A man used a skill, a knowledge, a talent. A woman like her used beauty.

No wonder she was eager to see England. Once there, she would be saved—to put it mildly—embarrassment.

Well, he was no child. You paid, in some fashion, for whatever you got. If you thought it was worth the price, you made the deal. He went to sleep thinking of her.

Franz awakened him in darkness, and when the first full light fell upon the east face of the mountain, they were ready. No full packs now, for the trip would be short. The summit lay not a thousand feet above. Only emergency rations and climbing equipment were needed.

They started, with Franz in the lead, and in an hour they had crossed a difficult face and were at the chimney. Tobin studied it briefly, almost unnecessarily, for it had been in his mind for years.

The eastern face of the mountain was split here, and they stood at the bottom of the huge V which cut through the last high ridge. The chimney was a tiny valley in the wall of rock, and the faces on either side of the ridge were absolutely unclimbable. The chimney was the only avenue of ascent.

It was, Tobin judged, nearly a hundred feet high, and at its top lay success, for it opened on a ledge not five hundred feet from the summit, and this would be a relatively easy climb.

He had tried it once, ten years before. The technique was simple. The climber placed shoulders against one wall, knees against the other, and thus braced, inched his way up. Pressure against both walls defeated gravity.

The only trouble was that in the last twenty feet, the chimney widened so that it was no longer shoulders and knees, but shoulders

and feet. Extension of the body was necessary to maintain friction, and when Tobin had failed, he had been no more than two feet from the top. He had, on that occasion, judged carefully the exact degree of safety, that moment when minimum friction would be lost. He had reached up with his right arm, and his fingers had grazed the very rim of the ledge he needed for a handhold. He had attempted a further extension of his body and there had been one terrible moment of sliding before his desperately stretching, jamming legs and shoulders had taken hold. And then he had come down, bathed in cold sweat.

Franz could not attempt this part of the climb. His stocky body made the required extension impossible for him.

But Thomson had insisted upon trying. He was several inches shorter than Tobin, but his desire to make the attempt could not be ignored. He had gone up slowly, carefully, and when he had reached the point Tobin had attained, he seemed to be lying straight out in the air. There had been a pause then, of perhaps a minute, and Tobin had known that he was trying to make up his mind. And then, outlined against the sky, Thomson had taken the chance. There had been one convulsive moment when he had reached upwards, and tried to fling himself at the ledge for the handhold. He had failed.

Now, Tobin readied himself. Franz said, " It is no time to be foolish. You will gain nothing by foolishness."

" I know," Tobin said. " Don't worry." But he could not speak of all that was involved. He had to prove to himself that he had been right on that occasion—that it had not been an error of his judgment or a flaw in his courage that had made it necessary for Thomson to climb and die. There was, too, as strong as ever, the challenge of the mountain. And there was the woman.

He went up slowly after a careful examination of the walls, his back to the summit-side of the chimney, the rope dangling below him. The first fifty feet were routine, back on one wall, hands and knees on the other. Then the cleft started to widen almost imperceptibly and his extension became greater.

In fifteen minutes he was at full stretch, at the exact point he had gained once before. He could sense the ledge above, and rolling his eyes upwards, he could almost see it. He tested the bracing of his body, then raised his right hand. His very fingertips touched the rim. He assayed all the factors, moved his body a fraction of an inch, and knew that he had reached the ultimate point of his balance. His fingers sought the ledge again without success; he knew he was through. He thought of making one last effort . . . But it would be insane.

He came down slowly, and when he reached the floor of the chimney Franz' face was white. "I thought, for a moment, that you would attempt to . . ."

Tobin shook his head. There was nothing to say. Bitterness was sharp in his throat and his mind could feel the full, oppressive weight of the mountain, for it had defeated him again. Nor had the galling sense of guilt been erased.

He went to the edge of the chimney and gazed for several minutes at the immense grandeur of a world to which he must descend.

They went down quickly to the cache and assumed their packs. From here they could reach the northern face, which offered a route far less difficult if a trifle longer. They would be at the inn sometime during the late evening.

They descended cautiously but quickly, *rappelling* down the tougher faces. This entailed driving in a piton and ring, running the extra rope through so that it hung doubled and free-running, then pulling it free when they had gone down the rope and reached a lower ledge.

Early afternoon found them off the peak itself and skirting the glacier. It was a matter now of merely covering distance. They reached the inn just before midnight, the last few hours of their journey having been across easy terrain and lighted by the folding lantern Franz had unearthed from his pack. Tobin went to his room and fell into an exhausted sleep.

He awakened to a bright blue day and it was several moments before he thought to reflect on his defeat. It seemed less important than it had in the night, somehow. He knew now that Thomson had been in error.

Then he thought of Corseti and the woman, and unease returned to him. The man would just be starting his final climb. Tobin felt that he would somehow be successful.

He dressed and went down. Rosa Karns was in Zermatt for the day. Tobin was restless. Now and then he'd go to the big telescope on the terrace and examine the mountain. He could see nothing of Corseti. The snowplume billowed off the cap with an unusual fullness, and he could see signs of bad weather building up in the west. Corseti would do well to get off the mountain as soon as possible.

In the evening he stood alone at the small bar and sipped a drink, watching the day die against the implacable mountain. He waited for the woman.

It was Franz who came instead. Franz and the second guide, Marcel, who had accompanied Corseti. The man was near

exhaustion. They sat at a table and Tobin heard the story.

Corseti and Marcel had followed Tobin's plan and had reached the chimney on schedule. Corseti had surveyed it carefully and had gone up with a rope.

Marcel had never seen anything like it. Magnificent climbing combined with acrobatics. Corseti had reached the point where he could not quite get a grip on the ledge. He had attempted the impossible, as Thomson had. But Corseti had succeeded. His effort, a turning, twisting leap from a prone and stretched position, had put both his hands on the ledge. He had hauled himself up.

He had shouted down, said he was belaying the rope around a jutting rock, and Marcel had started to climb. He'd put all his weight on the rope, testing it . . . and the rope had come falling down from the ledge above. He had heard a shout, and nothing more.

Corseti lay injured on the ledge. Marcel had gone up as far as he could, had shouted until he was hoarse. His calls had brought no answer. Then he had done the only thing possible. He had come down for help.

Tobin felt Franz' eyes upon him. He shrugged and said to the guide, " We will go up, of course." He hated the thought, but he had to go.

Franz nodded. " You and I now. We will use the northern route as far as the ridge. A party can follow. You will be ready soon ? "

" In less than half an hour," Tobin said.

He went up to his room, his mind crowded with conflict. Corseti up on the ledge, and where was the woman ?

It was not until he was crossing the terrace to meet Franz before they began their climb that she appeared, more beautiful than he had remembered. She carried her slim fullness like some fine animal, and in her eyes was a trace of the mockery.

" So ! You climbed your mountain ? "

" No." She knew damned well he hadn't. " We're just going up again. Corseti's there. He's hurt."

For a moment her face showed shock, then she asked evenly, " He is in a difficult place ? "

Tobin thought of the chimney. " Very difficult."

She came close to him. " Then why are you going ? What problem is it of yours ? Let the others take care of him. It is their business. Tomorrow you and I can leave here."

He shook his head. " It doesn't work that way. You see . . ."

" He is the champion of mountain climbers," she said. Her eyes were steadily on his. " Let him solve his own difficulties. Why should you risk yourself for him ? "

He stared at her. He said, " I'll be back in a day or two."

Her fury was astonishing. " What does he mean to you, to me ? Let him stay on his mountain ! " She stamped her foot in anger. " I demand that you do not go ! "

Tobin said, " I'll be back. You'll still be here." It was not a question.

And she was instantly another woman. The bitter fury was gone. She was close against him, her arms about his neck, her mouth soft against his own. Her voice was a murmur. " I will be here, of course. Forgive me. I do not want you to be injured. But hurry back to me."

Tobin and Franz set off in the new darkness, both carrying lanterns. Most of the night trip would be over rising but even ground. They made good time. Franz was worried about the weather. The season was drawing to a close and any day the big winds from the northwest could be expected.

On one of their infrequent stops Franz said, " Mademoiselle Karns is concerned about Corseti ? "

" I suppose so. As we all are. Why ? "

Franz shrugged. " About such a type I do not know."

" What do you mean ? "

" We learn things," Franz said. " The maid hears things. The woman and Corseti have been—together—for a year or more."

Tobin took it slowly, absorbing it, tasting the bitterness of it, knowing the woman fully, now, recalling her words, *Let him stay on his mountain !*

He got to his feet. " Let's be moving."

In the middle of the night the easy stage of their journey was ended. They were on the northern face, by far the easiest part of the mountain, and yet not without its difficulties. Their progress was painfully slow, yet every minute gained now against the morning was important. They fought their way upwards, grotesque figures projected against the rock by the light of the lanterns. By three o'clock in the morning Franz said, " We stay here until it is light. We can go no farther, but we have saved several hours."

The wait for dawn was interminable. Tobin sat with his thoughts, the woman dominating all of them. The wind was rising, and Franz said, " If we reach the chimney, we will be fortunate."

And in Tobin the thought persisted, *Why reach the chimney ?*

Then there was light to climb by, and they went up. The sun appeared, made its slow ascension in a clouded sky, and they fought the mountain. It was just noon when they came up on the ridge which would permit them to reach the cache. Tobin led in the long lateral traverse, inching his way along the face, and Franz followed.

At the cache they left all but the equipment they needed, then made their laboured way up to the floor of the chimney. The mounting wind swept through the V, and fine snow ripped against their faces from the cap.

They called up, but there was no answer. Franz looked at Tobin and shrugged. He said, " I will try it."

Tobin shook his head. There was no sense in that. He'd make the try again himself. He was getting to be an old hand at failure, here.

And failure today, he knew, was what he wanted. Failure now would suit his ends. He could welcome it.

Rope about his waist, he started up. He was fighting both the chimney and the weather, together with the intangibles of his emotions. His progress was slow and studied, and when the chimney widened he went on with great care, testing his extension at every upward inch.

And again he reached the point where he had twice failed. Oddly he was aware of a new bitterness where he had thought a while ago to find satisfaction. He reached up and again there was the rim. But he could not make it.

He heard it, then. A mumbled phrase on the ledge over his head. He called again and again, but the sound was not repeated. He rested there for moments, furious at this new defeat.

He started the trip down, carefully, and at once he was aware of a miracle.

He had studied these walls for hours, and neither he nor Franz nor the others who had attempted the chimney had ever been able to find a crack in them. But he felt one now. The muscle in his right shoulder detected a flaw in the smooth face of the chimney.

He moved down a few feet to one side, and looked up.

It was there. Tiny, almost invisible, running down from the ledge rim for three or four feet.

Tobin stayed there, braced. That tiny fissure made all the difference in the world. It was the measure of Corseti's salvation, but it would serve his own purpose well to ignore it.

He went down slowly, and his mind was decided. He descended to a point where the chimney narrowed so that his knees and back were braced strongly and comfortably. Then he unfastened the rope about his waist and lowered the free end. He called down, " Pitons and a hammer."

They came up to him quickly. He retied the rope and went up again, and this was terrible work. He reached the point where he'd been before, and with both hands drove the piton into the crack. He worked over his right shoulder, hardly daring to breathe. He lost two pitons, heard the sound of their fall, before he succeeded

in getting one in. Hammering it securely was torture, but he finally managed it, got a snap ring on the piton. He strung his rope through the ring and secured it again. Franz took up his weight on the rope and he hung free but supported.

From there it was a matter of minutes. He reached up, drove another piton and ring, used extra rope to tie himself to the higher ring, and the guide hauled him up to that. One more, and he was on the ledge. He pulled himself over the edge.

Corseti was there. The ledge was wide, and the manner of the accident was plain. The man had belayed the rope around a rock. The rope had parted a foot from the end. Corseti had dived for it, and his leg had become wedged between two rocks, his head had slammed against the ledge floor.

The leg was at a cruel angle, still tightly held by the rocks. The head wound was severe but not critical. Corseti had lost a great deal of blood and Tobin could imagine his agony through the long day and night. He freed the twisted leg, and Corseti cried out in his delirium.

The remainder of the task would be brutal work, Tobin knew, but it would be accomplished. The other party must be near them now. He would lower Corseti to the floor of the chimney, and others could take over from there.

He stood on the ledge and looked up above to the summit. He saw the route leading upwards. He and Franz could make it in an hour, easily. And they would, at some other time.

He looked downwards, then, upon the world below, and he thought of the woman.

He knew she was all he had found the mountain to be—cold, hard and unrewarding. There was cruelty and ruthlessness in them both and a great measure of unattainability.

But there the semblance ceased. The mountain had a quality she lacked. In all its brutality it was honest, and its beauty you could not buy but had to force by conquest. It was not cheap.

He did not want the woman.

He heard Franz shout from below, and knelt to secure the rope under Corseti's shoulders. He felt a vague sorrow, a pity for Corseti.

* * *

THE WORKER

Oliver Herford, author, illustrator, and well known wit, was breakfasting with friends in the country. Seeing a comb of honey on their breakfast table, he exclaimed: "How wonderful, to keep a bee!"

PICK AND CHOOSE

Try This On

The Pekinese
Disdain to please
On any set design,
But make a thrall
Of one and all
By simple Right Divine.

The Pekinese
Our houses seize
And mould them till they suit,
For every one
's Napoleon
And Wellington to boot.

The Pekinese
Abstain from fleas
And doggy things like that,
But hate it when
Unthinking men
Compare them to the cat !

The Pekinese
On China's seas
Embarked to win the West ;
A piece of Ming
's a lovely thing,
But oh ! the dogs are best !

E. V. LUCAS

For Size

The most wonderful of all that I shall mention, is the great Irish wolfdog, that may be considered as the first of the canine species. This animal, which is very rare even in the only country in the world where it is to be found, is rather kept for show than use, there being neither wolves nor any other formidable beasts of prey in Ireland that seem to require so powerful an antagonist. The wolfdog is, therefore, bred up in the houses of the great . . . as a curiosity.

Nevertheless he is extremely beautiful and majestic as to

appearance, being the greatest of the dog kind to be seen in the world. The largest of those I have seen, and I have seen above a dozen, was about four feet high, or as tall as a calf of a year old.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH, 1730-1774, *Animated Nature*

Or Maybe

DACHSHUND :

Of Teutonic ancestry—like the sausage, with which it has much in common—and originally designed—some say by Krupp's—for hunting badgers, if any. By reason of its low-slung, streamlined, markedly un-doglike chassis, is usually mistaken by its quarry for a fellow denizen of the wild, and welcomed accordingly ; all is then over, bar the skinning !

In appearance it resembles a short piece of wistful drainpipe, but has a sweeter disposition. At one time—notwithstanding the scarcity of badgers in Mayfair—was all the rage in London as the only possible dog for a lady of quality and refinement, but declined in popularity on being suspected—quite unjustly, as it turned out—of partial responsibility for the Great War. Vindicated by Mr. Lloyd George's memoirs, it is rapidly returning to favour ; and a good thing, too.

When asleep, makes an admirable fireside footstool for two or more persons. Should be fondled, however, with discretion, as when its head is being patted in the parlour, its tail is probably playing havoc with the crockery in the kitchen. Formerly known almost invariably as " Fritz " or " Otto," but nowadays answers with wholly justified reluctance to " Spot," " Fluff," " Tiny," and even " Fido."

Tough on the Dachshund, but there it is !

NINA SCOTT LANGLEY and K. R. G. BROWNE,
Dogs From All Angles

It's Industry You're After

To Doctor Williams, who did carry me into his garden . . . and he did show me how a dog that he hath do kill all the cats that come thither to kill his pigeons, and do afterwards bury them ; and do it with so much care that they shall be quite covered ; that if the tip of the tail hangs out, he will take up the cat again, and dig the hole deeper, which is very strange.

SAMUEL PEPYS, *Diary*, *September* 11*th*, 1661

Decided?

Well, of all dogs it stands confess'd
Your English bulldogs are the best !
I say it, and will set my hand to't ;
Cambden records it, and I'll stand to't !

CHRISTOPHER SMART, 1722-1771

We Should Warn You, Perhaps—

All my life I have been a one-dog man, and all *Tinker Bell*'s life she has been a one-man dog, so the partnership is perfect. When she is with me, butter won't melt in her mouth—in short, she behaves like the perfect angel.

But one day when we were walking, we met an acquaintance of mine, who looked at the dog and said: "Bull-terriers are not what they used to be: they have become sloppy creatures." To prove it he made a pass at me with his stick.

A white torpedo hit him amidships with her muzzle and sank him like a U-boat in the ditch.

I helped to brush his clothes, and he had the good grace to apologize. Tails were wagged on both sides, and all was well.

Chin up, tail up, we resumed our walk. Secretly we were both tremendously pleased with ourselves.

I said: "The guy who called you after a fairy must have been crazy." A cold nose nuzzled into my hand.

That is the worst of these bull-terriers, they're so darned sloppy.

T. A. LOWE, *Fruit Farm in England*

Oh—Well In That Case—

Blessings on thee dog of mine !
Pretty collars make thee fine,
Sugared milk make fat thee !
Pleasures wag on in thy tail,
Hands of gentle motion fail
Nevermore to pat thee !

Whiskered cats anointed free—
Sturdy stoppers keep from thee
Cologne distillations ;
Nuts lie in thy path for stones,
And thy feast-day macaroons
Turn to daily rations !

ELIZABETH BARRETT BROWNING, 1806-1861

BIG SHOT

It couldn't go on for ever—not even for Mayo Maloney

by WILLIAM SAROYAN

MAYO MALONEY at eleven was a little shrimp of a fellow who was not rude so much as he was rudeness itself, for he couldn't even step inside a church, for instance, without giving everybody who happened to see him an uncomfortable feeling that he, Mayo, despised the place and its purpose.

It was much the same everywhere else that Mayo went: school, library, theatre, home. Only his mother felt that Mayo was not a rude boy, but his father frequently asked him to get down off his high horse and act like everybody else. By this, Michael Maloney meant that Mayo ought to take things easy and stop finding so much fault with everything.

Mayo was the most self-confident boy in the world, and he found fault with everything, or so at least it seemed. He found fault with his mother's church activities. He found fault with his father's interest in Shakespeare and Mozart. He found fault with the educational system, the Government, the United Nations, the entire population of the world. And he did all this fault-finding without so much as going into detail about anything. He did it merely by being alive, just by being on hand. He did it by being nervous, irritable, swift, wise and bored. In short, he was a perfectly normal boy. He had contempt for everything and everybody, and he couldn't help it. His contempt was unspoken but unmistakable. He was slight of body, dark of face and hair, and he went at everything in a hurry because everything was slow and stupid and weak.

The only thing that didn't bore him was the idea of shooting, but his father wouldn't buy him a gun, not even a .22-calibre single-shot rifle. Michael Maloney told Mayo that as soon as he was sure that Mayo had calmed down a little, he would think about buying him a gun. Mayo tried to calm down a little, so he could have his gun, but he gave it up after a day and a half.

"Very well," his father said, "if you don't want your gun, you don't have to try to earn it."

"I did try to earn it," Mayo said.

"When?"

" Yesterday and today."

" I had in mind," his father said, " a trial covering a period of at least a month."

" A month ? " Mayo said. " How do you expect a fellow to stay calm all through October with pheasants to shoot in the country ? "

" I don't know how," Mike Maloney said, " but if you want a gun, you've got to calm down enough so I can believe you won't shoot the neighbours with it. Do you think my father so much as let me sit down to my dinner if I hadn't done something to earn it ? He didn't invite *me* to earn any gun to shoot pheasants with. He told me to earn my food, and he didn't wait until I was eleven, either. I started earning it when I was no more than eight. The whole trouble with you is you're too pent-up from not doing any kind of work at all for your food or shelter or clothing to be decently tired and ordinary like everybody else. You're not human, almost. Nobody's human who doesn't know how hard it is to earn his food and the other basic things. It's the fault of your mother and father that you're such a sarcastic and fault-finding boy. Everybody in this whole town is talking about how your mother and father have turned you into an arrogant ignoramus of a boy by not making you earn your right to judge things."

Mr. Maloney spoke as much to the boy's mother as to the boy himself, and he spoke as well to the boy's younger brother and younger sister, for he had left his office at half past four, as he did once a week, to sit down with the whole family for early supper, and it was his intention to make these mid-week gatherings at the table memorable to everyone, including himself.

" Now, Mike," Mrs. Maloney said, " Mayo's not as bad as all that. He just wants a gun to shoot pheasants with."

Mike Maloney laid down his fork that was loaded with macaroni baked with tomatoes and cheese, and he stared at his wife a long time, rejecting one by one two dozen different angry remarks he knew would do no one present any good at all to hear, and only serve to make the gathering unpleasantly memorable.

At last he said, " I suppose you think I ought to get him a gun, ust like that ? "

" Mayo isn't really rude," the boy's mother said. " It's just that he's restless, the way every human being's got to be once in his lifetime for a while."

Mayo didn't receive this defence of himself with anything like gratitude. If anything, it appeared as if he were sick and tired of having so much made of a simple little matter like furnishing him with an inexpensive .22-calibre single-shot rifle.

" Now don't you go trying to speak up for him," Mike Maloney said to his wife, " because, as you can see for yourself, he doesn't

like it. He doesn't enjoy being spoken up for, not even by his mother, poor woman, and you can see how much he thinks of what his father's saying this minute."

"What did I say?" Mayo asked.

"You didn't say anything," his father said. "You didn't need to." He turned to Mrs. Maloney. "Is it a gun I must buy for him now?" he said.

Mrs. Maloney didn't quite know what to say to that so she remained silent and tried not to look at either her husband or her son.

"O.K.," Mike Maloney said to both his wife and his son. "I have to go back to the office for a minute, so if you'll come along with me I'll drop into Archie Cannon's and buy you a gun."

He got up from the table and turned to Mrs. Maloney.

"Provided, of course," he said, "that that meets with your approval."

"Aren't you going to finish your food?" Mrs. Maloney said.

"No, I'm not," Mike Maloney said. "And I'll tell you why, too. I don't want him to be denied anything he wants or anything his mother wants him to have, without earning it, for one unnecessary moment, and as you can see, his cap's on his head, he's at the door, and every moment I stand here explaining is unnecessary."

"Couldn't you both finish your food first?" Mrs. Maloney said.

"Who wants to waste time eating," Mike Maloney said, "when it's time to buy a gun?"

"Well," Mrs. Maloney said, "perhaps you'll have something after you buy the gun."

"We should have been poor," Mike Maloney said. "Being poor would have helped us with this problem."

Mike Maloney went to the door where his son was waiting for him to shut up and get going.

He turned to his wife and said, "I won't be able to account for him after I turn the gun over to him, but I'll be gone no more than an hour. If we'd been poor and couldn't afford it, he'd know the sinfulness of provoking me into this sort of bitter kindness."

When he stepped out of the house on to the front porch, he saw that his son was at the corner, trying his best not to run. He moved quickly and caught up with him, and then he moved along as swiftly as his son did.

At last he said, "Now, look, I'm willing to walk the half mile to Archie Cannon's, but I'm not going to run, so if you've got to run, go ahead, and I'll meet you outside the place as soon as I get there."

He watched Mayo disappear far down the street. When he got

to Archie Cannon's, the boy was waiting for him. They went in and Mike Maloney asked Archie to show him the guns.

" What kind of a gun do you want, Mike ? " Archie said. " I didn't know you were interested in shooting."

" It's not for myself," Mike Maloney said. " It's for Mayo here, and it ought to be suitable for pheasant shooting."

" That would be a shotgun," Archie said.

" Would that be what it is ? " Mike Maloney asked his son, and although the boy hadn't expected anything so precisely suitable for pheasant shooting, he said that a shotgun would be just right.

" That's it, then Archie," Mike said. " A shotgun."

" Well, Mike," Archie said, " I wouldn't think a shotgun would be the proper gun to turn over to a boy."

" Careful," Mike Maloney said. " He's right here with us, you know. Let's not take any unnecessary liberties. I believe he indicated the gun ought to be a shotgun."

" Well, anyway," Archie said, " it's going to have a powerful kick."

" A powerful kick," Mike Maloney repeated, addressing the three words to his son, who received them with disdain.

" That is no matter to him," Mike Maloney said to Archie Cannon.

" Well, then," Archie Cannon said, " this here's a fine double-barrel twelve-gauge shotgun and it's just about the best bargain in the store."

" You shouldn't have said that, Archie," Mike Maloney said. " This man's not interested in bargains. What he wants is the best shotgun you've got that's suitable for pheasant shooting."

" That would be this twelve-gauge repeater," Archie Cannon said. " It's the best gun of its kind."

" Anybody can see it's a better gun," Mike Maloney said. " No need to waste time with inferior firearms."

He handed the gun to Mayo Maloney, who held it barrel down, resting over his right arm, precisely as a gun, loaded or not, ought to be held.

" Anything else ? " Mike Maloney said to his son, who said nothing, but with such irritation that Mike quickly said to Archie Cannon, " Cartridges, of course. What good is a shotgun without cartridges ? "

Archie Cannon jumped to get three boxes of his best shotgun cartridges, and as he turned them over to Mike Maloney, who turned them over to Mayo, Archie said, " A hunting coat in which to carry the cartridges ? A red hunting cap ? "

Mayo Maloney was gone, however.

" He didn't want those things," Mike Maloney said.

" Some people go to a lot of trouble about costume," Archie Cannon said.

" He doesn't," Mike Maloney said. " What do I owe you ? "

Archie Cannon wrote out the bill and Mike Maloney produced his wallet.

Archie said. " Has he got a licence ? "

" To shoot ? " Mike Maloney said. " He hasn't got a licence to eat, but damned if I don't admire him sometimes. He must know something to be so sure of himself and so contemptuous of everybody else."

" To tell you the truth," Archie Cannon said, " I thought you were kidding, Mike. I thought you were kidding the way you sometimes do in court when you're helping a small man fight a big company. I didn't expect you actually to buy a gun and turn it over to an eleven-year-old boy. Are you sure it's all right ? "

" Of course it's all right," Mike Maloney said. " You saw for yourself the way he held the gun." He counted out the notes. " That right ? " he said.

" That's right," Archie Cannon said. " I hope you know there's no pheasant to speak of anywhere near here. The Sacramento Valley is where the pheasant shooting is."

" Where are you going to be around ten o'clock tonight ? " Mike Maloney said.

" Home, most likely," Archie Cannon said. " Why ? "

" Would you like to drop over to my house for a glass of beer around ten ? " Mike said.

" I'd like that very much," Archie said. " Why ? "

" Well," Mike said, " this is the way I see it : It's a quarter past five now. It'll take him about three minutes to hitch a ride with somebody going out to Riverdale, which is about twenty-five miles from here. That would take an average driver forty or forty-five minutes to make, but he'll get the driver, whoever he is, or she is, for that matter, to make it in about half an hour or a little under. He'll do it by being excited, not by saying anything. He'll get the driver to go out of his or her way to put him down where the shooting is, too, so he'll start in right away, or a little before six. He'll shoot until after dark, walking a lot in the meantime. He won't get lost or anything like that, but he'll have to walk back to a road with a little traffic. He'll hitch a ride back, and he'll be home a little before or a little after ten."

" How do you know ? " Archie said. " How do you even know he's going at all tonight ? He just got the gun, and he may not even know how to work it."

" You saw him make off, didn't you ? " Mike Maloney said. " He was off shooting. And you can be sure he either knows how

to work the gun or will find out by himself in a few minutes."

" Well," Archie said, " I certainly would like to drop in for some beer, Mike, if you're serious."

" Of course I'm serious," Mike said.

" I suppose you want to have somebody to share your amusement with when he gets back with nothing shot and his body all sore from the powerful kick of the gun," Archie said.

" Yes," Mike said. " I want to have somebody to share my amusement with but not for those reasons. He may be a little sore from the powerful kick of the gun, but I think he'll come back with something."

" I've never heard of anybody shooting any pheasants around Riverdale," Archie said. " There's a little duck shooting out there in season, and rabbits, of course."

" He said pheasants," Mike Maloney said . . . " Here, better make it a little before ten, just in case."

" I thought you were only joking about the gun," Archie said. " Are you sure you did the right thing ? I mean, considering he's only eleven years old, hasn't got a licence and the pheasant-shooting season doesn't open for almost a month ? "

" That's one of the reasons why I want you to come round for some beer," Mike said.

" I don't get it," Archie said.

" You're game warden of this area, aren't you ? "

" I am."

" All right," Mike said. " If it turns out that he's broken the law, I want you to know it."

" Well," Archie said, " I wouldn't want to bother about a small boy shooting a few days out of season without a licence."

" I'll see you a little before ten, then," Mike Maloney said.

He spent half an hour at his office, then walked home slowly, to find the house quiet and peaceful, the children in bed and his wife washing the dishes. He took the cloth and began to dry them.

" I bought him the best shotgun Archie Cannon had for pheasant shooting," he said.

" I hope he didn't make you too angry," Mrs. Maloney said.

" He did for a while," Mike said, " but all of a sudden he didn't, if you know what I mean."

" I don't know what you mean," Mrs. Maloney said.

" I mean it's all right, that's all," Mike said.

" Well, that's fine," Mrs. Maloney said. " But where is he ? "

" Shooting, of course," Mike said. " You don't think he wanted a gun to look at."

" I don't know what I think now," Mrs. Maloney said. " You've

had so much trouble with him all along, and now all of a sudden you buy him an expensive gun and believe it's perfectly all right for him to go off shooting in the middle of the night on the third day of October. Why ? "

" Well," Mike Maloney said, " it's because while I was preaching to him at the table this afternoon, something began to happen. It was as if my own father were preaching to me thirty years ago when I was Mayo's age. Oh, I did earn my food, as I said, and I wanted a gun, just as he's been wanting one. Well, my father preached to me, and I didn't get the gun. I mean, I didn't get it until almost five years later, when it didn't mean very much to me any more. Well, while I was talking to him this afternoon I remembered that when my father preached to me I was sure he was mistaken to belittle me so, and I even believed that somehow—somehow or other, perhaps because we were so poor, if that makes sense—he would suddenly stop preaching and take me along without any fuss of any kind and buy me a gun. But of course he didn't. And I remembered that he didn't, and I decided that I'd do for my son what my father had not done for me."

" Do you mean you and Mayo are alike ? " Mrs. Maloney said.

" I do," Mike said. " I do indeed."

" Very much alike ? "

" Almost exactly," Mike said. " Oh, he'll not be the great man he is now for long, but I don't want to be the one to cheat him out of a single moment of his greatness."

" You must be joking," Mrs. Malone said.

" I couldn't be more serious," Mike said. " Archie Cannon thought I was joking, too, but why would I be joking ? I bought him the gun and cartridges, and off he went to shoot, didn't he ? "

" Well, I hope he doesn't hurt himself," Mrs. Maloney said.

" We'll never know if he does," Mike said. " I've asked Archie to drop in about ten for some beer because I guessed he'll be back by then."

" Is Mrs. Cannon coming with Archie ? "

" I don't think so," Mike said. " Her name wasn't mentioned."

" Then I suppose you don't want me to sit up with you," Mrs. Maloney said.

" I don't see why not, if you want to," Mike said.

But Mrs. Maloney knew it wouldn't do to sit up, so she said, " No, I'll be getting to bed long before ten."

Mike Maloney went out on the front porch with his wife, and they sat and talked about their son Mayo and their other children until a little after nine, and then Mrs. Maloney went inside to see if the beer was in the refrigerator and to put some food out on the kitchen table, to go with the beer. Then she went to bed.

About a quarter to ten Archie Cannon came walking up the street and sat down in the rocking-chair on the front porch.

" I've been thinking about what you did," he said, " and I still don't know if you did right."

" I did right, all right," Mike Maloney said. " Let's go inside and have some beer. He'll be along pretty soon."

They went inside and sat down at the kitchen table. Mike lifted the caps off two bottles of cold beer, filled two tall glasses, and they began to drink. There was a plate loaded with cold roast beef, ham, Bologna sausage and sliced cheese, and another plate with rye bread on it, already buttered.

When it was almost twelve and Mayo Maloney hadn't come home, Archie Cannon wondered if he shouldn't offer to get up and go home or maybe even offer to get his car and go looking for the boy, but he decided he'd better not. Mike Maloney seemed excited and angry at himself for having done such a foolish thing, and he might not like Archie to rub it in.

A little before one in the morning, after they had finished a half dozen bottles of beer apiece and all the food Mrs. Maloney had set out for them, and talked about everything in the world except Mayo Maloney, they heard footsteps on the back stairs, and then on the porch, and after a moment he came into the kitchen.

He was a tired child. His face was dirty and flushed, and his clothes were dusty and covered with prickly burrs of all kinds. His hands were scratched and almost black with dirt. His gun was slung over his right arm, though, and nested in his left arm were two beautiful pheasants.

He set the birds on the kitchen table, then broke his gun up for cleaning. He wrapped a dry tea towel round the pieces and put the bundle in the drawer in which he kept his junk. He then brought six unused cartridges out of his pockets and placed them in the drawer, too, locked the drawer with his key and put the key back into his pocket. Then he went to the kitchen sink and rolled up his sleeves and washed his hands and arms and face and neck, and after he'd dried himself, he looked into the refrigerator and brought out some Bologna sausage and began to eat it without bread while he fetched bread and butter and a chair.

He sat down and began to put three thick slices of sausage between two slices of buttered bread. Mike Maloney had never before seen him eat so heartily.

He didn't look restless and mean any more, either.

Mike Maloney got up with Archie Cannon, and they left the house by the back door in order not to disturb Mrs. Maloney and the sleeping children.

Outside the house, Archie Cannon said, " Well, aren't you going to ask him where he got them ? "

" He's not ready to talk about it just yet," Mike said. " What's the fine ? I'll pay it, of course."

" Well," Archie said, " there won't be any fine because there's not supposed to be any pheasants in the whole area of which I'm game warden. I didn't believe he'd get anything, let alone pheasants. Damned if I don't admire him a little myself.

" I'll walk home with you," Mike said.

In the kitchen, the boy finished his sandwich, drank a glass of milk and rubbed his shoulder.

The whole evening and night had been unbelievable.

Suddenly at the table, when his father had been talking to him, he'd begun to understand his father a little better, and himself, too, but he'd known he couldn't immediately stop being the way he had been for so long, the way that was making everybody so uncomfortable.

He'd known he'd have to go on for a while longer and see the thing through. He'd have to go along with his father. He'd known all this very clearly, because his father had suddenly stopped being a certain way—the way everybody believed a father ought to be—and Mayo had known it was going to be necessary for him to stop being a certain way, too—the way he had believed he had to be.

In the kitchen, almost asleep from weariness, he decided he'd tell his father exactly what he'd done, but he'd wait a while first, maybe ten years.

He'd had a devil of a time finding out how the gun worked, and he hadn't been able to hitch a ride at all, so he'd walked and run six miles to the countryside around Clovis, and there he'd loaded the gun and aimed it at a blackbird in a tree leaning over Clovis Creek and pressed the trigger.

The kick had knocked him down, and he had missed the bird by a mile. He'd had to walk a long way through tall dry grass and shrubs for something else to shoot at, but all it was was another blackbird, and again the kick had knocked him down, and he'd missed it by a mile.

It was getting dark fast by then, and there didn't seem to be anything alive around at all, so he began to shoot the gun just to get used to it. Pretty soon he could shoot it and not get knocked down. He kept shooting and walking, and finally it was dark and it seemed he was lost. He stumbled over a hidden rock and fell and shot the gun by accident and got a lot of dirt in his eyes. He got up and almost cried, but he managed not to, and then he found a road, but he had no idea where it went to or which direction to take.

He was scratched and sore all over and not very happy about the way he'd shot the gun by accident. He was scared, too, and he said a prayer a minute and meant every word of it. And he understood for the first time in his life why people liked to go to church.

" Please don't let me make a fool of myself," he prayed. " Please let me start walking in the right direction on this road."

He started walking down the road, hoping he was getting nearer home, or at least to a house with a light in it, or a shop or something that would be open. He felt a lot of alive things in the dark now that he knew must be imaginary, and he said, " Please don't let me get so scared." And pretty soon he felt so tired and small and lost and hopeless and foolish that he could barely keep from crying, and he said, " Please don't let me cry."

He walked a long time, and then far down the road he saw a small light, and he began to walk faster. It was a country store with a petrol pump at the front and a new van beside the pump. Inside the store was the driver of the van and the storekeeper, and he saw that it was twenty minutes to twelve. The storekeeper was an old man who was sitting on a box talking to the driver of the van, who was about as old as the boy's father.

He saw the younger man wink at the older one, and he thanked God for both of them, and for the wink, too, because he didn't think people who could wink could be unfriendly.

He told them exactly what he had done, and why, and the men looked at him and at each other until he had done talking. They both examined the brand-new gun too. Then the storekeeper handed the gun back to the boy and said to the younger man, " I'll be much obliged to you, Ed, if you'll get this young man home in our van."

They were a father and a son, too, apparently, and good friends, besides. Mayo Maloney admired them very much, and on account of them, he began to like people in general too.

" Not at all," the younger man said.

" And I'd like to think we might rustle up a couple of pheasants for him to take home too."

" That might not be easy to do this hour of the night," the younger man said, " but we could try."

" Isn't there an all-night Chinese restaurant in town that serves pheasant in and out of season ? " the old man said. " Commercial pheasant, that is ? "

" I don't know," the younger man said, " but we could phone and find out."

" No," the older man said. " No use phoning. They wouldn't be likely to understand what we were talking about. Better just drive up to it and go on in and find out. It's in Kern Street, but I forget the name. Anyhow, it's open all night, and I've heard you

can get pheasant there any time you like."

"It certainly is worth looking into," the younger man said.

The younger man got up, and Mayo Maloney, speechless with amazement, got up too. He tried to say something courteous to the older man, but nothing seemed to want to come out of his dry mouth. He picked up his gun and went out to the van and got in beside the younger man, and they went off. He saw the older man standing in the doorway of the store, watching.

The younger man drove all the way to town in silence, and when the boy saw familiar places, he thought in prayer again, saying, *I certainly don't deserve this, and I'm never going to forget it.*

The van made its way over the railway to Chinatown, and the driver parked in front of Willie Fong's, which was in fact open, although nobody was inside eating. The driver stepped out of the van and went into the restaurant, and the boy saw him talk to a waiter. The waiter disappeared and soon came back with a man in a business suit. This man and the driver of the van talked a moment, and then they both disappeared into the back of the restaurant. After a few minutes the driver of the van came back, and he was holding something that was wrapped in newspaper. He came out of the restaurant and got back into the van, and they drove off again.

"How's your father?" the man said suddenly.

"He's fine," Mayo managed to say.

"I mean," the man said, "you are Mike Maloney's boy, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am," Mayo Maloney said.

"I thought you were," the man said. "You look alike and have a lot in common. You don't have to tell me where you live. I know where it is. And I know you want to know who I am, but don't you think it would be better if I didn't tell you? I've had dealings with your father, and he lent me some money once when I needed it badly and we both weren't sure I'd ever be able to pay him back. So it's all right. I mean, nobody's going to know anything about this from me."

"Did they have any pheasants?" the boy said.

"Oh, yes," the man said. "I'm sorry I forgot to tell you. They're in that newspaper. Just throw the paper out of the window."

The boy removed the paper from around the birds and looked at them. They were just about the most wonderful-looking things in the whole world.

"Have they any shot in them?" he asked. "Because they ought to."

"No, I'm afraid they haven't," the driver said, "but we'll drive out here a little where it's quiet and we won't disturb too many sleeping farmers, and between the two of us we'll get some shot into

them. You can do the shooting, if you like."

"I might spoil them," the boy said.

"I'll be glad to attend to it, then," the driver said.

They drove along in silence a few minutes, and then the truck turned into a lonely road and stopped. The driver got out and placed the two birds on some grass by the side of the road in the light of the van's lights about twenty yards off. Then he took the gun, examined it, aimed, fired once, unloaded the gun, fetched the birds, got back into the van and they drove off again.

"They're just right now," he said.

"Thanks," the boy said.

When the van got into his neighbourhood Mayo said, "Could I get off a bit away from my house, so nobody will see this van accidentally?"

"Yes, that's a good idea," the driver said.

The van stopped. The boy carefully nested the two birds in his left arm, then got out, and the driver helped him get the gun slung over his right arm.

"I never expected anything like this to happen," the boy said.

"No, I suppose not," the man said. "I never expected to find a man like your father when I needed him, either, but I guess things like that happen just the same. Well, good night."

"Good night," the boy said.

The man got into the van and drove off, and the boy hurried home and into the house.

When Mike Maloney got back from walking home with Archie Cannon, he was surprised to find the boy asleep on his folded arms on the kitchen table. He shook the boy gently, and Mayo Maloney sat up with a start, his eyes bloodshot and his ears red.

"You'd better get to bed," Mike said.

"I didn't want to go," the boy said, "until you got back, so I could thank you for the gun."

"That wasn't necessary," the man said. "Not necessary at all."

The boy got up and barely managed to drag himself out of the room without falling.

Alone in the kitchen, the father picked up the birds and examined them, smiling because he knew whatever was behind their presence in the house, it was certainly something as handsome as the birds themselves.

* * *

It is better to be beautiful than to be good, but it is better to be good than to be ugly.

OSCAR WILDE

THE CUP

The solution seemed perfectly simple to me

by CHRISTOPHER SYKES

WHEN I was sent to Egypt as a staff officer during the first part of the war, I was very pleased to find that Adrian Lally was one of my colleagues. He was a man of intelligence, at once noble-minded and worldly, sharp-tempered and kindly—indeed a perfect fusion of some highly contradictory elements of character. Smooth in the most pleasing sense of the expression, he had delightful manners, and because he was a remarkably skilful negotiator he inevitably became involved in a great deal of back-stairs diplomacy.

It was a matter of diplomacy that brought us together again.

"I want your advice," he said. "There's been some quite appalling ecclesiastical trouble in Mahammadieh. It's very shocking, so far as I can make out, so I don't want to ask anyone else, for fear of causing scandal. I have Father Macdonnel coming to see me at eleven tomorrow. Can I rely on you?"

I kept that appointment.

Father Macdonnel was seated on a chair opposite to Adrian. His eyes flashed fire, his lean neck was red with anger. He had apparently come to the end of a discourse.

"And I'm telling you, Colonel Lally," he was saying, "that it is a blasphemous and detestable occurrence to which I have been subjected, and I am demanding the strongest imaginable action by the Commander-in-Chief, both on behalf of myself, and of the chaplains under my command."

Adrian turned to me. "Here you are at last," he said. "Of course, you know Father Macdonnel."

I had met him several times before. He was the senior Catholic chaplain in one of the corps of the Eighth Army, a position he disliked, as it kept him at Headquarters, and he was a bold, adventurous man.

When he first came to Egypt as a battalion chaplain he had the misfortune to become well known on account of certain acts of daring in the course of duty, and this caused the authorities to promote him to his present post for which he was not happily fitted.

Office work, the dull duties of " welfare " organization, and so on, had a little soured his temper, and the outburst, of which I had heard the concluding phrases, was characteristic of his changing nature. Irish bitterness was taking the place of Irish good-humour.

We shook hands, for we had not met for some months, and I said I was very glad to see him again. Adrian led us to the table and pointed to chairs. He then opened the conference in a formal manner.

" Father Macdonnel has just come from Mahammadieh," he said, " which is Rear-Headquarters of his corps for the time being. Things have been going badly, and the question is whether it would be a good thing to inform the Chief personally. Now, Father Macdonnel, if it is not too much trouble, would you repeat what you have just told me in the fullest possible detail for the benefit of our friend. I also would like to hear the facts again so as to get them straight."

As he pushed cigarettes in front of us, Adrian caught my eye for a second, and I noted a look of fun. Father Macdonnel began his tale.

In time of war one gets so used to odd things that one's mind becomes like a bin; such quantities of queer trash are flung into it daily, to be emptied out later, that, in the way of bins, a beautiful jewel or other little masterpiece lies confused with the rubbish, and not noticed till later. It was not immediately that I recognized that Father Macdonnel's experiences at Mahammadieh were among very remarkable incidents of sacred history.

In those far-off days the name of Mahammadieh was heavily charged with emotion, for it was the name of the second most important town in Italian North Africa. It had once been Italian Headquarters. The capture and loss of Mahammadieh under Sir Archibald Wavell, its recapture by Sir Claude Auchinleck, its loss again by us to Rommel in 1942, had all been occasions of extreme excitement, days bright with joy or black with bitterness. At the end of 1942 the place came into the news for the last time. General Montgomery, it will be remembered, attacked at Alamein, and on a great day less than a month later, poor Mahammadieh was liberated for good. There was no battle this time. The Germans and Italians retreated and we rushed in, and among the first on our side to head as fast as possible for this town was Father Macdonnel.

For him the place had special attractions. Among the monuments which the Italians had raised to their colonial rule was a Christian cathedral, a spacious, handsome building, not very distinguished architecturally, but well-proportioned, and supporting

a large, very well-designed green dome. It was not a stupefaction of the world, as Italian propagandists used to say, but it was a civilized edifice. It conferred genuine dignity on Mahammadieh. To this church Father Macdonnel now sped in his fifteen-hundredweight truck with holy zeal. He wanted to start religious services in it immediately, if possible, so that not one day should elapse in which Mass had not been celebrated within its walls.

He arrived to find expected confusion. All the priesthood, except one, had left in panic. Between the retreat of the Axis army, and the arrival of our own, there had been an interval of several hours during which there had been some abominable scenes of looting, nowhere worse than in this part of the town; indeed, an effort had been made to burn down the whole quarter.

After looking round the littered streets, Father Macdonnel went into the cathedral. He saw a hideous heap of smashed and upturned church furniture in the centre of the nave, and on this a group of about twenty British soldiers reclining in different attitudes of fatigue. Some of them were dozing. The wakeful ones were smoking. Military kit was strewn all over the floor and rifles piled against the high altar. In a dark corner, gibbering with fear, crouched the aged sacristan, who had been left behind.

He was simple, in the sense that his mental powers had degenerated into subnormality. Father Macdonnel watched him come out of his corner, and in pitiful fear, like that of an animal exploring some object of fascination and terror, hesitantly creep towards the soldiers, gaze at them with terror-wide eyes, and then appeal to them in broken accents and using pathetic gestures of beseeching.

Father Macdonnel swiftly corrected the situation. He started by ordering the men to remove their hats and put out their cigarettes, and after an hour or so he ended by rewarding them for their heavy labours by assigning them billets in two of the side chapels of the now thoroughly well-tidied fane.

He gave them this shelter on condition that they behaved with scrupulous decency and left as soon as other accommodation was available. There was a look in his eye and something about his thin, set mouth which made them obey him. Having settled the men, he began to inspect damage with the poor old bearded sacristan who was called Battino.

There was less than he had feared. True, a great many window panes were smashed; no lecterns remained; where, Battino assured him, there had been a silver offertory stand by the high altar, there was now an ugly rent in the plaster; the golden door of the tabernacle, the rich sanctuary lamp, and the candlesticks, had been stolen; and in the sacristy many cupboards had been wrenched

open and all the copes removed.

The " treasure," the collection of monstrances and other sacred vessels presented by the King of Italy after the Lateran Treaty, and by other people on other occasions, had all gone too. The Germans had taken a good deal, but most of the looting had been done by the local people.

At the end of their tour of inspection, Battino sat down in the sacristy and wept bitterly; but Father Macdonnel stood fingering his chin and saying to himself: " Well now, it's not so bad as it might be. Not by any means."

The Sacrament had not been violated; it had not been removed by the runaways, but it had been well hidden away. The church linen, the chasubles, the stoles and maniples had, rather inexplicably, escaped the notice of the looters, and, oddest thing of all, the altar wine was standing unhidden and unmolested in a corner. The looters were probably coming back for a final visit when the approaches to the cathedral from the poor quarters were blocked by the advancing army. A merciful chance. Father Macdonnel gave the sacristan a pull at his whisky flask and continued his inspection alone.

Perhaps if he had not already found much to surprise him agreeably he would not have been so exasperated at the loss he now discovered. He returned to the sacristy after an intense search and addressed Battino. " *Ubi Calix?* " he asked in a rich brogue, " Where is the chalice? " for their conversation was conducted in the decadent Latin of the Roman Rite, in which language Father Macdonnel's Irish intonation was more noticeable than in English.

" Stolen! Stolen! " wailed the old man. " See, this is where the chalices were kept," and he tottered pointing to a splintered cabinet, " and there were other chalices here! " he whirled round and pointed to the battered treasure, " and they took the copes too, and the Holy Water stoup, and the Offertory-stand, and—"

" Yes, yes, I know," said Father Macdonnel. " *Repetare non est necessarium. Who* took the chalices? That's the point."

" *Tedeschi! Germani!* " replied the sacristan.

" Oh." This was serious. " All of them? "

" All! All! Even the chalice which was used at Mass at the high altar yesterday morning. I myself saw an Arab running away with it." And with a fresh burst of tears he pointed to a small cupboard over one of the chests of drawers before which the priest is wont to vest himself for Mass.

" An Arab? Not a German? "

" No! No! An Arab! " cried the sacristan, wringing his hands, as though this made it a thousand times more frightful.

"He came in all alone while the rest of his people were in the church, and he tore open the cupboard—like this—like a wild beast—and then he ran away with the chalice. I tell you I saw him! I saw him!"

Father Macdonnel sat down and went over this evidence carefully. He established that while all the other chalices had been taken by the Germans, this chalice, the one used at the high altar that day, had been stolen by a local man. He patted the sacristan on the shoulder and assured him that he would get the chalice back to the cathedral. He meant it, he believed it. Meanwhile, using his own battered mug-like field chalice, he said Mass in the cathedral next morning.

Father Macdonnel had an interpreter, a man called Attar, who accompanied him everywhere. I remembered Attar well; indeed, his heavily-charged breath, which contrasted so eerily with his name, was unforgettable, and it was through Attar that Adrian, for a little time, as though by a side door, made a minor but personal appearance in the story.

Why Father Macdonnel kept this transparent Syrian scoundrel in his service was an insoluble mystery, unless you remembered the attraction that great sinners have for holy people. Attar had been dismissed from a Greek cotton firm for theft when he presented himself to Father Macdonnel as a persecuted Lebanese Christian thirsting to work for the glory of God.

As with so many people of criminal character, his cunning was inextricably mixed with stupidity, and on this occasion he had not troubled to find out whether Father Macdonnel knew Colonel Lally. He would have done well to investigate this matter, as it contained seeds of disaster: a few months previously Attar had presented himself to Adrian as a Moslem grandee who knew every Mohammedan notable from King Ibn Saud downwards. Adrian had dismissed him after a few weeks' highly unsatisfactory service, whence he had gone to the Alexandrian cotton business.

Father Macdonnel was told all about this, but in vain. Because his nature was what it was, he conceived a sort of mad loyalty to this atrocious being. "I want an interpreter," he said, "not a virtuous man."

Attar was without doubt a very gifted linguist. He could strip all beauty and poetry from at least five idioms. He could make French sound gross and Arabic insipid.

The day after their arrival in Mahammadieh, Father Macdonnel gave Attar his instructions. He was to lurk about the bazaars and find out what had become of the looted church property. He was to get the names of the looters and tell them to bring the stuff to

the church. He could promise them rewards and no legal action against them.

"And how much dough am I empowered to promise these people, sir?" asked Attar.

"You can tell them to come along at eleven on Sunday without fear," replied Father Macdonnel, "and I'll give them something out of the collection at Sung Mass."

"But these people will be at me for one hell of a lot of cash, sir."

"I dare say. But I'm not here to subsidise sacrilege."

With a rather indefinite financial programme, therefore, Attar sneaked off to the poorer quarters.

The bazaars, with their age-long romance of teeming swindle, were to Attar what hot-houses are to flowers of the equator. He did well there. Within three days he had obtained five candlesticks, the door of the tabernacle, a lamp which had been stolen from a private house (as was discovered much later), but which did good service in the sanctuary, and a number of other odds and ends from the great pillage.

Attar, mingling promises with threats, got the looters to bring these things to the church. Success, as usual, went to his feather-brained head, and before very long he was promising vast fortunes. The treasure began to flow back again, and several items had to be rejected by Father Macdonnel as being by no conceivable probability part of the furnishings of a Christian place of worship. Father Macdonnel calculated that within a week much more than half the looted property would once more be in the hands of the clergy. On Saturday the silver offertory-stand was returned.

Father Macdonnel was a straight and honourable man. In consequence, he made a sorry mess of this business, because, once involved in a shady policy, he lost his way. He was short-sighted in crime. He made an idiotic error in promising this dividend on Sunday: a little thought should have made it clear to him that his interest lay in a firm refusal to pay anything until all the looted property was returned. But even in the performance of good works he inclined to be impulsive and unreflective. He was lost here.

After Mass on Sunday he went to the sacristy door, as arranged. He found a vociferous and sweltering mob who had assembled on Attar's instructions. Attar himself stood in front of them with a hideous proprietary air, and he greeted the priest with a wave of his hand to his flock. "Here they are, sir," he said.

Father Macdonnel surveyed them from the steps with a scowl.

"What do they want?" he asked.

"Why, what the hell d'ya think they want except to be paid up, of course." Attar could never rid himself of the habit of talking down to his audience. The habit had lost him many friends, but not this one yet.

"These are the looters, are they?" the priest answered with affected surprise. "I see. Very well, give them twenty-five piastres apiece."

"Twenty-five piastres!" screamed Attar in horror, but before he could say more the priest, in order to forestall him, shouted in Arabic: "Twenty-five piastres!"

Immediately a suspicion of the ghastly truth as to how they had been tricked began to spread in the crowd. Many of them turned to Attar to demand what this meant, and Attar, after an unsuccessful attempt to parley with Father Macdonnel, who stood at the top of the sacristy steps looking on with icy contempt, repeated to them that their reward was to be twenty-five piastres each, which in those days was equivalent to five shillings.

"And hurry up and get on with it," added Father Macdonnel, dramatically throwing a tied-up roll of notes to him.

There was something so awful in the priest's controlled anger that a hush came for a moment over the crowd. Attar, with a worried expression, had actually begun to perform his task of distributing these paltry wages before he was brushed aside, and there arose a wild loud long wail, followed suddenly by another, deep, horrible, more savage noise—the voice of their loathing of the infidel Christian, the voice of Jahad or Holy War. One or two advanced to the priest with extended palms showing the little crumpled, cheap banknotes which they had received in the place of expected millions. But Father Macdonnel raised his hand for silence, and through Attar spoke to them. They listened appalled at what he said.

If they thought they were merchants, he began, they were mistaken. They were looters. Their names had all been taken. It was not customary to reward looters but to punish them. Did they know what the punishment for looting was? It was—death. (He suspected, rightly, that Attar would not like to translate this, so he said it three times, and added some gestures.) Strictly, he went on, they were all under sentence. If there was one more word of complaint, their names, all of them, would be given to the Military Police and there would be a mass execution. He had no more to say. The choice was theirs. He had spoken.

A minute later dust rose high into the air. Without waiting for their money, with the rapid patter of the feet of fear, they rushed off to their houses and hid in them for the rest of that day and most of the next.

Attar was worried.

"Why didn't ya let me speak to these damned natives, sir?" he asked.

"Because I do it better," replied the priest angrily.

"You make one hell of a mess of it, sir. Who's going to sell me any church gadgets now, eh? You've killed the damned cow who lays the golden calf. You don't understand these ruddy people, sir."

"I'm not a Moslem, if *that's* what you mean."

"No more am I a Moslem. Colonel Adrian Lally is one damned big liar. He goes round Cairo crying out filthy things concerning me. Who the hell says I am a Moslem?"

"You do when it suits you."

But Attar was quite right. Returns of church property dropped to nil immediately, the flow of sacred valuables had been turned off at the main, the spring had been parched by disappointment and fear, and the chalice, the chalice which, without doubt, was somewhere there in those filthy bazaars, had not been recovered.

Father Macdonnel's irritation increased as he thought over this failure. His ultimate realization that, if he had followed Attar's advice, he would almost certainly have succeeded, was bitter in the extreme. Desperately he took to the bazaars himself. He strode about them with a black frown on his face; he glared and peered into every shop where a chalice might be hidden amid piles of junk; he yelled his sixteen words of Arabic into many a merchant's ear; he achieved nothing.

At this point an important development began. Attar once more took a hand in the search.

General Montgomery's advance was in full tide. Ten days after Father Macdonnel's arrival in Mahammadieh the rumble of the guns was no longer audible there, and from the poetry and squalor of the front line the town began to turn to the discomforts of restored life. It had been, comparatively speaking, mildly damaged in the campaign, and the army decided to use it as a convalescence and sick leave centre—of course, on a modest scale. It had a good hospital, a few large hotels, and excellent sea bathing. It had once hoped to be a tourist-trap.

As Mahammadieh remained the Rear-Headquarters of Father Macdonnel's corps, he was obliged to stay there until the next big leap forward in the advance, and so he was ordered to help his colleagues to found some sort of a troops' club. The chaplains had a great deal of work to do in devising from slender materials the means for men to enjoy themselves, nor were any of them particularly gifted in this task. Least of all Father Macdonnel.

He was not interested in enjoyment.

They were all much relieved when a regular "welfare" officer arrived from Cairo. For Father Macdonnel this meant, above all, that he could give more time to the restoration of the religious life of the cathedral, an undertaking where, in the midst of success, he was never for an instant unmindful of his one great failure: the absence of a certain chalice from the altar.

The welfare officer was an energetic and efficient man. He got a cinema going; he conjured up concerts and theatricals; he saw that the club was well stocked with newspapers, and tinned beer called Rheingold; and he organized a sports meeting . . .

At this sports meeting the main event was to be a horse race, and this horse race was to be run for a trophy, and the trophy was to be known as The Mahammadieh Cup. Father Macdonnel was invited to be a steward. The welfare officer was a very able officer indeed.

It was Attar who told Father Macdonnel that the chalice had been discovered. He told him that he had found the man who had bought it from the thief, and—here Attar looked suspiciously mournful—the man who had unfortunately sold it to a British officer. Oh yes, he knew who the officer was; yes, he was in Mahammadieh. He was Major Swinstead. Swinstead was the name of the welfare officer . . .

At the time when I heard this story from Father Macdonnel, I was puzzled by Adrian's signal to me with his eyes at the first mention of the horse race, and I would be happy indeed if I could convey to the reader the slow accumulation of enjoyment, the gradual and luxurious sinking into the pleasures of comedy, which I experienced as the truth dawned on me. The Mahammadieh Cup and the chalice were one and the same.

"I took the sacristan round," said Father Macdonnel as he told the story. "I took him round and he identified it. Oh yes, he identified it. It was standing in Major Swinstead's office. There was no mistake about it. Attar had told me the truth. The cathedral chalice was the intended trophy."

On the morning following this exposure Father Macdonnel sent round an early note to the welfare officer to say that he would call at ten-thirty on a most important matter. He would prefer to see him alone.

Had Attar remained away from the scene, there would have been a slender chance of the misunderstanding between the priest and Swinstead being arranged amicably, but unfortunately, at this moment, Attar, that cunning and foolish man, must needs try his hand at diplomacy.

Before that important ten-thirty he visited the welfare officer. He tried to frighten him. He told Major Swinstead how Father Macdonnel had summoned the people of the bazaars and threatened them with a massacre if all cathedral property was not returned immediately, and how he had personally ransacked several shops in search of the chalice, and how, when he had heard that Major Swinstead had it in his possession, he had broken into his office with the sacristan in order to make sure. "I tell you, Major Swinstead," he concluded, "that man is just raving crazy for his chalice. I warn you, sir, not to make him more crazy. If you do, I am damned well blowed if he will not seize the chalice by force and/or violence from you. I know damned well indeed what I am speaking about."

Major Swinstead was one of those people who are easily liable to a sense of grievance. After Attar's visit he felt a very considerable sense of grievance. He was not a Catholic. In so far as he thought about religion, he did so as a very pure Protestant.

At half-past ten Father Macdonnel called on Major Swinstead. He was smiling and bent on good manners. He had forced himself to be optimistic about this matter. He was painfully aware of his faults of temper, and he was determined not to be unjust to Major Swinstead who, after all, was entirely guiltless in what had happened.

"Good morning, Major," he said, "I hope I am not discommoding you, but you were good enough to ask me to be a steward at the races . . . That is not a thing I believe I should do, strictly in accordance with Canon Law, but I think we may reasonably wave aside these objections in a place like Mahammadieh. Now, Major, I want to talk to you about this very horse race. It is about," and he shot a glance to the mantelpiece on which the chalice was standing, "the Cup."

Major Swinstead was a big fair man whose features in ill-humoured repose took on a look of obstinate surliness. On these occasions his voice sounded low and sullen, like the sound of a bell—the sort of bell, moreover, which might fittingly be hung in a large brick neo-Gothic clock tower in an English market square.

"What about the Cup?" he said.

Father Macdonnel caught the note of hostility.

"I should greatly like to know how you come to be in possession of that cup," he replied with a quick flash of anger in his eye.

"I bought it," said the Major, and gazed at him in the manner of some huge short-horn bull, as much as to say: "If you leave me alone you can quit the field without being gored."

Father Macdonnel started afresh. For the last time that morning he trod the path of appeasement.

"Well now, that's very understandable, and I am sincerely

sorry to have to cause you a great deal of disturbance and inconvenience. But the truth is, Major, that cup is church property. It is not a simple gold cup at all. It is a chalice. It is the cathedral chalice. It has been identified by Battino the sacristan—you know, the old man who remained behind—and strictly speaking it belongs to me, so long as I am here."

Major Swinstead's mouth became depressed as in an inverted smile; his face, including the lower of his two chins, became suffused with redness, in the midst of which his fair moustache seemed to sparkle like lightning flashes in sunset clouds. A wonderful sight.

"If you want," he said with slow and massive irony, "if you want to put in a claim that it's looted property, all right, well and good. I'll forward it myself, and at the end of the war, or whenever Claims give you an authorization, the owner of the cup will give it back to you on receipt of compensation from the sub-department concerned. But, by heaven," went on Major Swinstead, "coolly walking into my office and just ordering me to hand over the cup . . . And not only that. Coming along with this Battino or whatever he's called and breaking into my office when I'm not there. Turning my whole office upside down. And then coolly walking in here and demanding my property. Honestly, padre, I think that's the outside limit." Major Swinstead had those extraordinarily morbid feelings of affection and loyalty towards the room where he conducted business which are so common in any form of official life, and particularly in the army.

Father Macdonnel turned on Swinstead in a passion of vehemence.

"You are talking like an uneducated child. Breaking into your office, my goodness! As a steward I have a right to see the cup—and I saw it. The door was open. As a priest I have a duty to identify sacred property and Battino has enabled me to identify it. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Major Swinstead, talking so to me. You say I walk in and demand your property. I have not done so, but I will do so now. I tell you that that cup is my chalice, and I have a right to demand my chalice. And I do demand it. I demand that you hand over that cup, Major Swinstead. Do you understand that!"

"I bought that cup," said Major Swinstead, "and I won't hand it over unless I'm ordered to. That cup," he went on, "cost me a lot of money. I can get some of it back, I dare say, but it was a jolly expensive cup. It isn't a lot of fellows who'd pay up more than they can afford with only an outside chance of a rebate, so's the chaps'll have a decent cup to race for. I'm not complaining. I'm simply trying to tell you that I'm not going to give up that

cup, church property or no church property, no matter what you, and no matter what Battino, or anybody else damn well says, unless I'm ordered to by the Corps Commander or my senior officer in Cairo."

Father Macdonnel then posed him a serious question.

"Do you realize, Major Swinstead, that to Catholics that cup is as sacred as any material object can be?"

Major Swinstead replied simply: "I'm not a Catholic."

There was no more to be said. Father Macdonnel rose to his feet.

"I will refer this matter elsewhere," he said, and stalked in white fury out of the Welfare Office.

Heroic moments beget their contraries: moods of high passion often give way to moods of inventive common sense. As he walked out of Major Swinstead's office, Father Macdonnel was in a state of exalted anger in which he felt he could have passed through the torture of martyrdom with defiant joy, in which the blows of chains would have felt like the blows of feathers.

But when he arrived at the cathedral he was in a perfectly calm and practically inclined state of mind. He had said he would refer this matter elsewhere. He would indeed, and not first to the Corps Commander. A terrible smile crept over his thin mouth. He summoned Attar to his little office by the sacristy, and together they were long in conference.

When Attar left, Father Macdonnel sent a curt note to Major Swinstead saying that he was not able to act as a steward for the forthcoming races.

"Darned difficult chap, this R.C. padre," said Major Swinstead in the mess. "First he wants to pinch our cup, and now he won't act as a steward."

"Funny," said his friend, "I'd have thought he was a sportsman."

The great day came, and every one, by which I mean more than half of the local people, the entire staffs of the various Headquarters, the wounded who could move, and the convalescents, two battalions who were in transit to the front line, and a hundred or so on sick leave, went to the racecourse. There was a greater crowd than had been seen there before in its short history. The sports began at three. And the egg and spoon races, the three-legged races, the hurdles, the camel race, the donkey race, went, all of them, as the frivolous overture before the performance of the great piece: the Mahammadieh Cup. A cab race had been suggested, but it was pointed out that all but a few of the cab horses of the town had been entered for the main event.

The racecourse at Mahammadieh where this sporting festival took place is well designed. It was once madly hoped that horse racing would be one of the main attractions beckoning to tourists across the world, as is the case in Cairo. There is a paddock, an enclosure, a grandstand, and even a totalisator, though unfortunately the latter had recently received a direct hit, having been taken from the clouds for an important military installation which, for all one knows, it might have been in the insanely practical way of warfare.

This mattered little, however. There were bookmakers in the army, and they proclaimed themselves in many parts of the course. Newmarket sprang up like a mushroom in this oasis of Libya. Somebody rang a bell for saddling. When he rang it again five minutes later, a string of horses processed from the stables behind the paddock, each one saddled, and led by a native of the town, except one. This was a nice-looking half-Arab, very much the superior of the others. Arab is a loose term which covers many obscure breeds outside Arabia, but what was noticeably non-Arabian about this particular horse was its size, and a certain easy swing in its gait. It was led by Attar.

Before the bell rang again there was much cheering and jeering as the jockeys entered the sacred ring. Their caps and jackets were surprisingly professional in appearance and cut, but white breeches and mahogany-topped boots were in all cases substituted by khaki trousers fastened at the knee.

It was amazing, so I was told by a man who was present, to see how exactly like an English race meeting this farcical competition became. The local people represented the dense, noisy crowd, the densest and noisiest of all English crowds, the officers and men on leave became the counterparts of the privileged of the enclosures, and one could see instinctively how this man wore his white top hat at Ascot, or how that one with a bowler tilted forward over his brow, stood in impressive and secret preoccupation on the Knaves-mire. The Corps Commander had flown over from forward Headquarters especially, for there was a lull in the advance. Major Swinstead deputised for the clerk of the course.

The riders stood in the ring discussing last minute instructions with their patrons, as is the custom. Only one stood apart. He appeared on the card as E. Macdonnel. He ground his teeth. He was reflecting that for a priest to dress up in this clownish costume was very nearly sacriligious in itself. Supposing . . . no, he would not toy with that appalling possibility. He had some faith in Attar's researches into the past racing history of Mahammadieh. He had yet more faith in his own eye for a horse. He had another faith, too, which exalted him. He wished the " jockeys up " bell would ring and hasten the end of this blasphemous farce.

The Corps Commander came up to him.

"Well, padre, this is a surprise seeing you here. Very sporting of you. Jolly good." He laughed.

"Thank you, sir." He was tempted to tell him precisely why he *was* there. With blazing eyes he looked at the general, but controlled his feelings.

"Nice horse you've got, too. Looks as if he's got some breeding."

"I selected him with care, sir. I believe him to be a quarter bred, and if that is true it will be by Gay Crusader by the ugly look of him."

As Father Macdonnel said this he looked at the horse again. There is a kind of equine ugliness which is enjoyable because, as they say in horsey language it "fills the eye."

"I'll back you, padre." The general chortled with delight.

"You might do worse, though the horse is not young," replied Father Macdonnel, who was not joining in the general's amusement.

"By Jove, he stands out, doesn't he? How did you find him?"

"My interpreter assisted me. We borrowed him from one of the shaykhs who used to race here."

The bell rang.

"Ah, you Irish! You can't keep away from a horse, can you?" He held up a finger waggishly. The priest did not smile.

"I have ridden very little since I took orders . . . If you'll excuse me, sir, I must mount."

"Good luck, padre."

There was a parade of horses on the course before the start. One of the first things to be noticed was how one or two horsemen stood out by reason of their professional style, and on the strength of it, number eighteen, E. Macdonnel up, became the favourite. When the beast cantered by the enclosure, wagging his head and lashing with his tongue, the odds on him shortened by yet another point. There were thirty-four in the field.

Starting was difficult, because professional starters are rarer than other officials of the turf, and there had been no time for experiments or rehearsals on an adequate scale. The starting gate, therefore, was handled in a clumsy manner. The proverb about too many cooks and broth applied well here: the gate was for ever going up and down, and there was a moment when a horse was swept off its hooves which were entangled in the strings. After this the gate was abandoned for the old-fashioned flag. There were six false starts, from which several horses never returned. When they did get away, number eighteen was last.

With few exceptions, the riders flogged their horses into

maximum speed from the beginning. Not so E. Macdonnel. It would be inaccurate to say that he rode a waiting race; he rode a professional race. His first object was to keep in the running, holding his horse for a final turn of speed, though beyond a general belief in the power of heredity, he had no means of knowing whether this turn was to be found in the descendant of Gay Crusader. He hoped so and guessed so.

The race was ambitious: two miles and a half long. There were many distractions. At the seventh furlong one horse fell down dead. Half a furlong on another crashed into the rails at the bend. E. Macdonnel did not so much fear being shut in as being confused by dizziness from the zigzag path of the horses before him. His chance came at the last corner, a little under a mile from home.

Here, while he hugged the rails, the whole field lurched over in a body to the far side, and another sickening, splintering crash made him suppose, rightly as it happened, that yet another horse had been thrown off the course through the rails. A sharp competitor, ridden by a steeplechase jockey of former days, was coming up on his right. When he heard that approaching noise he at last liberated the all-necessary turn of speed, on which everything depended.

It was there. It was not a great turn of speed, but it was there. He heard the horse on his right blow up with a very audible explosion, while his own horse settled into a heavy slogging gallop. It was not a fast horse. It was not a born winner. He heard another coming up behind him. He applied the whip. He spurred with his heels. But no tortures on this earth could accelerate the speed. The other horse grew near him, on his right again, but before it was abreast it also exploded. The descendant of Gay Crusader was a stayer, that was wonderfully clear. E. Macdonnel continued to apply the whip, but without avail, only the heavy slogging gallop went on, at a regular speed.

But it did go on. It went on and on and on. He was aware of a noise of cheering all about him. He saw the post ahead, and riding as though he was trying to strike out of a dead heat, Father Macdonnel won the Mahammadieh Cup by fourteen lengths. *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam.*

When the cup was presented to Father Macdonnel by the Corps Commander, Major Swinstead came forward, beaming with admiration. Though he looked rather like a clock tower, he was a warm-hearted man. But something in Father Macdonnel's expression warned him not to chaff or joke about this matter. The major held out his hand. Father Macdonnel took it in his own. This was not a reconciliation, it was a temporary act of fellowship

in honour of the human virtues which show in sportsmanship. The gulf yawned as wide as ever, a bridge had been built sufficient for one passage only. And so the two men shook hands.

"And there," concluded Father Macdonnel, "you have the whole story before you. That is the naked fact, told without prejudice, and that is the case I wish your assistance in to lay personally before the Commander-in-Chief, so as to avoid the scandal of a whole lot of people hearing it in the usual channels."

The solution was perfectly simple to me, and to Adrian, and we exchanged a look. In that look, however, we telepathically told each other what was the obstacle to accepting this solution. The depth of Father Macdonnel's religion was equalled by its simplicity and narrowness. There was no place in it for a sense of humour.

"Well," said Adrian, turning to me. "And what do you suggest?"

I said the obvious thing which I believed to be the right thing: "If this were in my own responsibility I should leave it where it is, because to guard against the future seems to me such a waste of time here. I cannot believe that this sort of thing happens very often, and Father Macdonnel has got the chalice."

There was a short pause. Adrian slowly nodded his head to show he approved of what I had said.

"I should like to agree with you," answered the priest, "but this is a matter of principle."

Adrian gave me a second look which said: "Go on. Keep it up."

"Father Macdonnel," I said, hoping my voice did not sound too queer, for as images began to come together more clearly in my mind, the desire to laugh began to hurt my sides, "surely it is true that the principle has been vindicated in the most remarkable way possible; so remarkable, in fact, that to appeal to the military authorities now seems to me—if I may say so—to reopen a settled case at an absurdly lower level."

As Father Macdonnel thought over my last words his mouth formed into a hard downward-pointing smile. "No," he said, "I cannot accept that explanation, much as I would like to. You are suggesting miracles, are you not? There was nothing miraculous about this horse race, good gracious me. I know how to pick horses, and I know how to ride them, and most of these boys didn't. That's all that happened. And, indeed, this race was the very opposite of an occasion of grace—can you think of anything less edifying than that the clergy should compete like jockeys for sacred vessels? I think any right-minded spectator will have been

utterly disgusted by this exhibition, if he knew what was really taking place."

"Oh, I cannot think so," I answered. "On the contrary, I think they'd be deeply impressed." Though I knew that I was arguing against a wall, and though I felt myself being pushed back by this superhuman will to my last and weakest defences, I went on: "I'm sure you're wrong about that, Father Macdonnel. And then there is the very point you make yourself: no one does know what was really taking place. No one except Major Swinstead. Is he likely to tell everyone?" I had a desperate hope, which was fulfilled, that Swinstead's sense of humour was as obtuse as Father Macdonnel's.

Father Macdonnel hummed and rubbed his chin for a second. "No, I will say that the major is a discreet man. No one had heard about this business in Mahammadieh when I left. That is true." He gave me this small point, but showed no sign of giving way.

I went on: "Well then, no one knows except Major Swinstead —oh, and Battino, but I gather he is of small account."

Then Father Macdonnel knocked me out of the ring. "And Attar," he said with all his dreadful grimness back.

But at this moment, which I thought signalised the end of the contest, Adrian brought his hand down on the table with a slam. "Attar," he said.

We both turned towards him.

"Attar," he said again, "he's the man. He's the solution. This is really all much simpler than I thought. Listen to me. Attar has an abandoned wife who came to me for help a little time ago, and she told me a great deal about him, including details of his spiritual experiences. Yes, I fear the case of Madame Attar will be with you soon, and it's going to cause you a lot of trouble, because Madame Attar is a Moslem.

"Now forget about that for the moment and listen to the following, all of which can be confirmed: Attar was born a Christian in the Lebanon and apostatized to Islam, when he went into the service of one of the Egyptian princes here, when he was a young man. Since then, as you know, he dodges between the Cross and the Crescent in accordance with the fluctuations of the market. You may wonder what is the significance of this to your case. Believe me, it is immense. Tell me, Father, does Attar attend Mass when he goes round with you?"

For the first time that morning Father Macdonnel smiled broadly as he said: "Indeed he does, the rascal. He never misses it. I am supposed to be highly impressed. Oh, dear; oh, dear; he's a simpleton is Attar."

"I believe that. Now tell me something else: you came here the day before yesterday—Saturday. Isn't that so?"

"Yes. Saturday."

"I guessed so. I went to High Mass in St. Joseph's yesterday morning. After Mass, as the congregation was going out, I noticed something familiar by the main door. There was Attar, going out, too. I wondered, then, what this was about, but now I understand. Attar had attended Mass, and not just to impress *you*, for once.

"And Attar paused at the box for the upkeep of the services, and he put in what looked to me like a hundred piastre note. Not a large part, I dare say, of his ill-got gains, but generous by his standards. Father Macdonnel, when you won that race you did not only win a chalice. I would not dismiss the earlier suggestion of miracles. You may win a race by your own exertions, but you don't reclaim Attar that way."

There was a long silence. Father Macdonnel, I could see, was moved.

He got up to his feet.

"Well, Colonel Lally," he said. "You know G.H.Q. better than I do, so I will take your advice and not approach the Commander-in-Chief. Thank you for your trouble, both of you. Good morning." He marched out of the office.

I do not know what epilogue there was with Attar's wife as heroine, but the fact that there was neither a scandal, nor any reappearance among us of Madame Attar suggests happy endings. Of one thing I am certain: Any happy ending to a story with which Attar was even distantly connected must have been directly fashioned by powers greater than man.

* * *

CHECK

Sam Goldwyn was trying to strike a bargain with George Bernard Shaw. The Irish playwright was not at all eager to have his plays made into films and made his terms almost impossibly stiff. Finally Goldwyn attempted to appeal to the artist rather than to the businessman.

"Think, Mr. Shaw," said Goldwyn, "think of the millions who will now have the opportunity to get acquainted with your art."

"Ah, Mr. Goldwyn," said the mischievous Shaw, "you think of nothing but Art, while I think of nothing but money."

LONG WEEKEND

It was still only a game, just a family outing—

by RAY BRADBURY

SOMEHOW the idea was brought up by Mother that perhaps the whole family would enjoy a fishing weekend. But they weren't Mother's words; Timothy knew that. They were Dad's words, and Mother used them for him, somehow.

Dad shuffled his feet in a clutter of Martian pebbles, and agreed. So immediately there was a tumult and a shouting, and quick as jets the camp was tucked into capsules and containers; Mother slipped into travelling-breeches and blouse, Dad stuffed his pipe full with trembling hands, his eyes on the Martian sky, and the three boys piled yelling into the motorboat, none of them really keeping an eye on Mother and Dad, except Timothy.

Dad pushed a button. The water-boat sent a humming sound up into the sky. The water shook back and the boat nosed ahead, and the family cried "Hurrah!"

Timothy sat in the back of the boat with Dad, his small fingers on top of Dad's large hairy ones, watching the canal twist, leaving the crumbled place behind where they had landed their small tourist rocket.

Dad had a funny look in his eyes as the boat went up-canal. A look that Timothy couldn't fathom. It was made of strong light and maybe a lot of joy. It made the deep wrinkles laugh instead of worry or cry.

So there went the tourist rocket, around a bend, gone.

"How far are we going?" Robert splashed his hand. It looked like a small crab jumping in the violet water.

Dad exhaled. "A million years."

"Oh!" said Robert.

"Gosh!" said Michael.

"Look, boys." Mother pointed one soft, long arm. "There's a dead city."

They looked with fervent anticipation, and the dead city lay dead for them and them alone, drowsing in a hot silence of summer made on Mars by a Martian weatherman.

And Dad looked as if he was pleased that it was dead.

It was a futile spread of pink rocks sleeping on a rise of sand, stretching lazy crumbled arms out three miles, petering finally into a dribble of collapsed pillars, a few tumbled wharves, one lonely shrine with images stolen from it, and then the sweep of sand again. Nothing else for miles. A white desert around the canal, and a blue desert over it, with a sun drifting on the blue one.

Just then a rocket went up. Like a stone thrown across a blue pond, hitting with a scar of flame, falling deep, deeper, and vanishing.

Dad had a scared look in his eyes when he saw it, and added speed to the boat, gritting his teeth.

That was the last Earth Rocket for one hundred days.

Looking up at the sky that was an ocean, you couldn't see a trace of war. Couldn't see men fighting and slaughtering each other.

Space dimensions narrowed all that down to one specule of matter, a dot against the cosmos labelled Earth. As removed and far off as two flies battling to the death in the arch of a great high and silent cathedral. And just as senseless.

William Thomas wiped his forehead, and felt the touch of his son's hand on his arm, like a young tarantula, thrilled. He beamed at his son. "How goes it, Timmy?"

"Fine, Dad."

Timothy couldn't quite make up his mind what was going on inside the vast adult mechanism beside him. The man with the immense hawk nose, sun-burned, peeling—and hot blue eyes like the agate marbles you used to play with after school in summer far away on Earth, and the long, thick columnar legs in the loose riding-breeches.

"What are you looking at so hard, Dad?"

"I was looking for Earthian logic, common sense, good government, peace and responsibility."

"All that up there?"

"No. I didn't find it. It's not there any more. Perhaps it'll never be there again. Perhaps we were fools to think it was ever there."

"What—?"

"See the fish," said Dad, pointing.

There rose a soprano clamour from all three boys as they rocked the boat in arching their necks to see. They *ooh*ed and *aah*ed. A silver ring-fish floated by them, undulating, and closing like an iris, instantly, around food particles, to assimilate them.

Dad looked at it. His voice was deep and quiet. "Just like war. War swims along, sees food, contracts. A moment later—Earth is gone."

"William," said Mother.

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Dad.

Another ring-fish came by, drawing more noise from them, and more pointing. And then they sat still and felt the canal water rush cool under them, swift and glassy. The only sound was the motor-hum, the rush of the water, and the sun heating the air—which wasn't much. Once in a great while a bird would come singing and go singing and drop from hearing and sight.

On both sides of the canal now they saw the great oxygen vines and bushes, planted in irregular diagrams upon sand; plants with deep-reaching roots thrusting miles after the withered water-gut of the planet; sown by far-seeing scientists of Earth fifty years before, and only now profuse enough, active enough, to give Mars a thin atmospheric shell.

Dad looked at them and shook his head. He caught himself when he saw Mother staring at him, and this was another symbol that Timothy couldn't fathom.

"When do we see the Martians?" cried Michael, who was ten years old and decorated conspicuously with the medals of Earthian skin-coloration—freckles. "When do we see the Martians?"

"Quite soon, perhaps," said Father. "This afternoon. Or tonight."

"How do you mean?" asked Mother. "The Martians are a dead race."

"Oh, no, they're not. I'll show you some Martians, all right," William Thomas said, presently.

Timothy scowled at that, but said nothing. There was no questioning the alien thought patterns of grownups. And he had found it far more satisfactory to place his questions only intermittently, and then when he was certain his parents would humour them.

The other boys were already engaged in making shelves of their small hands and peering under them towards the seven-foot stone banks of the canal, watching for Martians.

"What do they look like?" demanded Michael.

"You'll know them when you see them." Dad sort of laughed, and Timothy saw a pulse beating time in his cheek.

Mother was slender and soft, with a woven plait of spun-gold hair over her head in a tiara, and eyes the colour of the deep, cool, canal water where it ran in shadow, almost purple, with flecks of amber caught in it. You could see her thoughts swimming around in her eyes, like fish—some bright, some dark, some quick, some slow and easy, and sometimes, like when she looked up where Earth was, being colour and nothing else.

She sat in the boat's prow, one hand resting on the side, the other on the lap of her dark blue breeches, and a line of sunburned soft neck showing where her blouse opened like a white flower.

She kept looking ahead to see what was there, and not being able to see it clearly enough, she looked backwards towards her husband, and through his eyes, reflected then, she saw what was ahead; and since he added part of himself to this reflection, a determined firmness, her face relaxed, and she accepted it, and she turned back, knowing, suddenly, what to look for.

Timothy looked, too. But all he saw was a straight pencil line of canal going violet through a wide shallow valley penned by low, eroded hills, and on until it fell over the sky's edge. And this canal went on and on, through cities that would have rattled like beetles in a dry skull if you shook them. A hundred or two hundred cities dreaming hot summer day dreams and cool summer night dreams.

They were going far on this outing—to fish. But there was a gun in the boat. This was a holiday weekend. But why all the food, more than enough to last them years and years, left hidden back there near the rocket? Fishing trip? But just behind the veil of the holiday was not a soft face of laughter, but something hard and bony and perhaps terrifying. Timothy could not lift the veil, and the two other boys were busy being ten years old and eight years old respectively.

"No Martians yet. Pouf!" declared Robert, seriously annoyed. He put his v-shaped chin on his hands and glared at the canal.

Dad had brought an atomic-radio with him, strapped to his wrist. It functioned on an old-fashioned principle; you held it against the bones near your ear, and it vibrated, singing or talking to you. Dad listened to it now. His face looked like one of those fallen Martian cities, caved in, sucked dry, almost dead.

Then he gave it to Mother to listen. Her lips dropped open.

"What—?" Timothy started to question, but withdrew tactfully, to watch.

Glancing hastily upwards, Dad notched the boat speed higher, immediately. The boat leaped and bounced and spanked. This shook Robert out of his annoyance, and elicited yelps of frightened but ecstatic joy from Michael, who clung to Mother's legs and watched the water pour by his nose in a wet torrent . . .

Dad must have seen something, because he cut speed, swerved the boat, and ducked it into a little branch canal and under an ancient crumbling stone wharf dwelling that smelled like crab flesh.

The boat stopped, and Dad twisted to see if the ripples on the canal were enough to reveal their route into hiding. Water lines

went across, lapped the stones, and came back to meet each other, settling to be dappled by the sun. It all went away.

Dad listened. So did everybody.

High in the sky there was a sound like a metal spider spinning a web of noise over and across, down and around, over and across; a swift weaving over the whole land again and again. The spider was a rocket, and the web was flame and noise from its jets.

Dad's breathing echoed like fists beating against the cold wet wharf stones. In the shadow, Mother's cat-eyes just watched Father for some clue to—what next?

The sky spider stopped spinning its web and went away. Father sank back, sighing, and Timothy put out his hand and patted the dark hair on his arm.

A moment later there were two titanic, marrow-jolting explosions that grew upon themselves, followed by half a dozen others.

"The ship," said Dad. "They've found the rocket."

Michael said, "What happened, Dad, what happened?"

"Oh, they've just blown up our rocket, that's all," said Timothy, trying to sound matter-of-fact. "I've heard rockets blown up before. Ours has just blown up. Not only ours, but four others." Timothy thought about it and added, "There were only four others on Mars. Down by the Science Colony where those one hundred men lived."

"Why did they do that?" asked Michael. "Eh, Dad?"

Dad still listened, the radio to his ear, blinking wet eyes. After two minutes he dropped his hand as you would drop a rag.

"It's all over," he said to Mother. "The radio just went off the atomic beam. Every other world station's gone. The air is completely silent. It'll probably remain silent."

"For how long?" asked Robert.

"Perhaps—your great-grandchildren will hear it again," said Dad. He just sat there, and the children were caught in the centre of his awe and defeat and resignation and acceptance.

Finally, he put the boat out into the canal again and they continued in the direction in which they had originally started.

It was beginning to get late. Already the sun was down in the sky, and a series of dead cities was ahead of them.

Dad talked very quietly and gently to the boys. Many times in the past he had been brief, distant, removed from them, but now he patted them on the head with just a word, and they felt it.

"Mike, choose a city."

"What, Dad?"

"Choose a city, son. Any one of these cities we pass by."

"All right," said Michael. "How do I choose?"

"The one you like the most. You, too, Robert, and Tim. The city you like the most."

"I want a city with Martians in it," said Michael.

"You'll have that. I promise," said Dad. His lips were for the boys, but his eyes were for Mother.

They passed six cities in twenty minutes. Dad didn't say anything more about the explosions; he seemed much more interested in having fun with the boys, keeping them happy, than anything else.

Michael liked the first city they passed, but this was vetoed because everyone doubted quick, first judgments. The second city nobody liked. Timothy liked the third because it was fairly large. The fourth and fifth were too small, and the sixth brought acclaim from everyone, including Mother, who joined in the cries of delight.

There were fifty or sixty huge structures still standing; streets were dusty, but paved, and you could see one or two old centrifugal fountains still pulsing wetly in the plazas. That was the only life—water leaping in the settling sun.

"This is the city," said Timothy.

"Yes, this is it," agreed Dad. "Yes, Alice?"

Mother nodded swiftly, on her face an exact replica of Dad's expression.

Steering the boat to a landing-place, Dad jumped out. "Here we are, sons. This is ours. This is where we live from now on."

"From now on?" Michael was incredulous. He stood up, looking, and then turned to stare back at where the rocket used to be. "What about the rocket? What about home?"

"Here," said Dad. He placed the wrist radio against Michael's blond, pear-shaped skull. "Listen."

Michael listened. "Nothing," he said.

"That's right. Nothing. Nothing at all any more. No more Earth, no more Rocket."

Michael considered the lethal revelation and began to sob little dry sobs, unoiled as yet by tears.

"Wait a moment," said Dad, the next instant. "I'm giving you a whole lot more in exchange, Mike!"

"What?" Michael held off the tears, curious, but quite ready to continue in case Dad's further revelation was as disconcerting as the original.

"I'm giving you this city, Mike. It's yours."

"M-mine—"

"For you and Robert and Timothy, all three of you, to own for yourselves."

Timothy bounded out of the boat. "Look! All for us; all of *that!*" He was playing the game with Dad, playing it good and

big, and without a tear. Later, after it was all over and things had settled, he could go off by himself and cry for ten minutes. But now it was still a game, still a family outing, and the other boys must be kept playing.

Mike jumped out, with Robert. They helped Mother out.

" Be careful of your sister," said Dad, and nobody knew what he meant until later.

They hurried into the great pink-stoned city, whispering among themselves, because dead cities have a way of making you want to whisper, to watch the sun go down.

" In about five days," Dad said quietly, " I'll go back down to where our rocket was and collect the food hidden in the ruins there, and bring it up ; and I'll hunt for Ralph Edwards and his daughters and his wife there."

" Daughters ? " asked Timothy. " How many ? "

" Four," said Dad.

" I can see that'll cause trouble later," said Mother cryptically.

" Girls ! " Michael made a face like an old Mars stone image. " Girls. *Gahh !* "

" Is this really ours, Dad ? "

" The whole planet belongs to us, sons. The whole darned planet."

They stood there, Kings of the Castle, Grand High Chieftains, Rulers of All They Surveyed, Unimpeachable Monarchs and Presidents, trying to understand what it meant to own a world, and how big a world really was.

Night came quickly in the thin atmosphere, and Dad left them in the square by the pulsing fountain, went down to the boat, came walking back carrying a pile of papers in his big hands.

He laid the papers in a clutter in the old courtyard and set them on fire. To keep warm, they crouched around them and laughed, and Timothy saw the little letters leap like frightened animals when the flames touched and engulfed them. The papers crinkled like an old man's skin and the cremation surrounded words like this :

Government Bonds, Political Manifestos, Religious Quarrels, Beliefs, Sciences, Prejudices of World Unity, Stock Report for July 23, 2044, THE WAR DIGEST.

Dad had insisted on bringing these papers, for this purpose. He sat there and fed them into the fire, one by one, with satisfaction, and told them what it all meant.

" I'm burning a way of life, just as that way of life is being burned clean on Earth right now. Forgive me if I talk like a politician. I am, after all, a former government official, and I was

honest, and they hated me for it. Life on Earth never oriented itself! It never seemed to have time to settle down or get anywhere worth while. Science got too far ahead of them too quickly, and the people got lost in a scientific wilderness, like children playing with pretty things, gadgets, helicopters, and rockets; putting emphasis on wrong things; on machines instead of the thought of how to run the machines. Wars got worse and killed them. That's what the silent radio means. That's what we ran away from.

"Mars is ripe for colonization. Scientists have worked for half a century to prepare rockets. I was a government official. I had influence. I arranged it so that your mother and I could bring you children here as the first colonial family. I knew the war was coming, that the scientists would be called back from Mars to help. We were supposed to go back, too. We didn't. We took a fishing trip.

"Well, I hoped it wouldn't be as bad as this. I didn't want to tell you boys unless I had to. But Earth is gone. Interplanetary travel won't be back for another two hundred years, perhaps longer, perhaps never. But that way of life proved itself wrong, and it strangled itself with its own hands. You're young. I'll tell you this again every day until it sinks in."

Dad paused to feed more papers into the fire.

"Now, we are alone. We and a handful of others who are to meet us in a few days. *If* they lived. A few of them, I'm sure, will come up the canal. Enough to start again. Enough to turn their backs on the chaos and strike out on a new line—"

The fire leaped up to emphasize his talking. He was full of that fire. And then all the papers were gone, except one. That was a symbol, too. All the laws and beliefs of Earth were burned into small hot ashes which soon would be carried off in a wind.

Timothy looked at the last thing that Dad tossed in the fire. It was a political map of the Earth, and it wrinkled and distorted itself hotly and went—*flimpf*—and was gone like a warm, black butterfly. Timothy had to turn his head away and swallow, hard.

"Now, I'm going to show you the Martians," said Dad. He got up. "Come along, all of you. Here, Alice." He took her hand.

Michael was crying loudly, and Dad picked him up and carried him, and they walked down through the ruins towards the canal.

The canal. Where tomorrow or the next day their future wives would come up in a boat—small laughing girls now, with their father and mother.

The night came down around them, and there were stars. But

Timothy couldn't find Earth. It had already set. That was something to think about. *It was already set.*

A cool night wind blew around them, and as they walked, Dad said, "Your mother and I will try to teach you. Perhaps we'll fail. I think not. We've had experience. We've seen. We planned this trip years ago, even before you were born. Even if there hadn't been a war, we would have come to Mars to live and form our own standard of living. It would have been another hundred years before Mars would have been even faintly poisoned by Earth civilization. Now, of course—"

They reached the canal. It was long and straight and cool and wet and reflective in the night.

"I've always wanted to see a Martian," said Michael stiltedly. "Where are they, Dad? You promised."

"There they are, Mike," said Dad, and he shifted Michael on his shoulder and pointed straight down.

The Martians were there, all right. It sent a thrill chasing through Timothy.

The Martians were there—in the canal—reflected in the water. Timothy and Michael and Robert and Mother and Dad.

The Martians stared back up at them for a long, long silent time from the rippling water . . .

* * *

SEA CHANGE

From the Round Pond this February morning
I hear the outboard flutter of wings on the water
And a sea-mew's siren.

Look where this grey gull, in the sunlight turning,
Circles the mainland and skims into harbour
Like a Catalina.

Ducks at the dockside, their brown hulls bobbing,
Cluster of masted swans, the long-shore sparrows,
Swarm on the tide-line.

Only this early boy, at my dream's ebbing,
Thrusting his white-winged yacht among the waders,
Scatters a seascape.

PAUL DEHN

SWEET SORCERY

The beauty of a woman cheereth the countenance, and a man desireth nothing so much

Ecclesiasticus

Dr. Overall was déane of St. Paules, London . . . most remarqueable by his wife, who was the greatest beautie in her time in England . . . She was not more beautiful than she was obligeing and kind, and was so tender-hearted that (truly) she could scarce denie any one. She had (they told me) the loveliest eies that ever were seen, but wondrous wanton . . .

JOHN AUBREY, 1626-1697, *Brief Lives*

In Heaven Afar—

And when she recklessly
Gave herself wholly unto Love and me,
Beauty in heaven afar
Laughed from her joyous star.

HELEN WADDELL, *Mediaeval Latin Lyrics*

Nor Was She Cautious . . .

The Arabian Lady was tall and very slender very sworfy of complexion and very thinn faced; having nothing on but a thinn loose garment a kinde of gyrdle about her middle and the garment open before. She had a ringe in her left nostrill which hung downe below her nether lipp; at each eare a round globe as bigg as a tennis ball, shining like gold, and hanging almost as low as her brest . . .

She had also gold chaines about her wrists and the smalls of her naked legs. Her nayles of her fingers were coloured almost redd and her lips coloured as blew as indigo; and so also was her belly from the navill to her hammes, painted blew like branches of trees or strawberry leaves. Nor was she cautious but rather ambitious to shew you this sight . . .

HENRY TEONGE, *Naval Chaplain, in a Diary*, 1675

The Mischief

'Tis not love, Tom, that doth the mischief, but constancy . . .

SIR JOHN SUCKLING, 1609-1642,
in a letter to Thomas Carew

Sorceress

Mary Talbot, Mrs. Tom Talbot, that is, was lovely. She had red hair with green lights in it. Her skin was golden, with a green under-cast, and her eyes were green, with little golden spots. Her face was triangular, with wide cheek-bones, wide-set eyes, and her chin was pointed. She had long dancer's legs and dancer's feet, and she seemed never to touch the ground when she walked. When she was excited, and she was excited a good deal of the time, her face flushed with gold.

Her great-great-great-great great grandmother had been burned as a witch.

JOHN STEINBECK, *Cannery Row*

When The Small Bird Pipes . . .

In a little wood I met a shepherdess, fairer than any star she seemed to me.

Her hair was gold and crisp with curls, her eyes were filled with love, her cheeks were ruddy ; with a little wand she led her lambs to pasture, and her feet were wet with dew ; she sang as one that knows of love and she was decked with everything that pleases.

With love I straightway did salute her, and asked if she had one to roam with her, and softly she made answer that she went through the wood alone, alone, and said : " Wit ye that when the small bird pipes my heart yearns for a lover."

When she had told me this and when I heard the small birds sing throughout the wood, within myself I said : " Now is the time to take delight with this young shepherdess." I begged her grace that it might be her will for me to kiss and to embrace her only.

She took me by the hand with amorous will and said that she had given me all her heart ; she led me then beneath the greenwood tree, there where I saw the many-coloured flowers, and there I tasted so much joy and pleasure-it seems I must have seen the god of Love.

GUIDO CAVALCANTI, 1250-1300,
translated by RICHARD ALDINGTON

Iberian

The images globed in your dark head,
Iberian,
Springs of an older race than mine.

My fantasy climbs laboriously back
To Helen,
Parvenu at Troy.
You, beyond knowing, know
Whence Troy was digged.

Tell me by night
In the whispered compact of thighs :
Wordlessly declare
What's carried in that round dark head,
Iberian.

A. L. MORTON

No Crime

One night . . . as I was preparing my bed, I perchance looked over a part of the wall that was a little broken down, and on a slip of terrace that was close under it I discovered a female, who was employed in assorting and spreading out tobacco leaves.

Her blue veil was negligently thrown over her head; and as she stooped, the two long tresses which flowed from her forehead hung down in so tantalizing a manner as nearly to screen all her face, but still left so much of it visible, that it created an intense desire in me to see the remainder . . .

I made a slight noise, which immediately caused her to look up; and, before she could cover herself with her veil, I had had time to see the most enchanting features that the imagination can conceive, and to receive a look from eyes so bewitching, that I immediately felt my heart in a blaze.

With apparent displeasure she covered herself; but still I could perceive that she had managed her veil with so much art, that there was room for a certain dark and sparkling eye to look at me, and to enjoy my agitation.

As I continued to gaze upon her, she at length said, " Why do you look at me ? It is criminal."

" For the sake of the Sainted Hosien," I exclaimed, '" do not turn from me; it is no crime to love: your eyes have made roast meat of my heart . . ."

JAMES MORIER, 1780-1849,
The Adventures of Hajji Baba of Ispahan

GUARDIAN ANGEL

This was no good intention, but a sudden fancy

by FRANK O'CONNOR

ALL the trouble really began when Mr. Dooley on the Terrace died. Mr. Dooley was a commercial traveller with two sons in the Dominicans, so he was really a cut above us, but he was a man who was very fond of the sound of his own voice, and all he had to do of an evening was to cross the road and stand at the garden gate laying down the law to my father. After these sessions my father always stumped in with an excited air to my mother and said, " Do you know what Mr. Dooley is after telling me ? "

My father was really quite upset about his death, because it was unexpected and Mr. Dooley was about the one age with himself—a thing which always induces a certain solemnity in a man of mature age—and even more, because now he would have no one to tell him anything. You could count on your fingers the number of men on our road who read the papers like Mr. Dooley or my da, and among them there wasn't one who would be seen, night after night, standing at our gate.

" Half-past two to the Curragh," said my father thoughtfully, putting down the paper with the death notice on it.

" But surely you're not thinking of going to the funeral ? " asked my mother in alarm.

" Ah, now," said my father with a toss of his head, " we were always very friendly."

" I think," my mother said with suppressed emotion, " that it will be as much as anyone will expect if you go to the church with him. Sure, we hardly know the people."

" Now," said my father with great dignity, " we'd be glad if it was our own turn—God between us and all harm ! "

My father was always liable to lose a half-day's pay for the sake of a funeral. It wasn't so much that he liked funerals as that he was a conscientious man who did as he would be done by, and if anything could have consoled him for the thought of his own death it would have been the prospect of a public tribute of respect. And, to give the mother her due, it wasn't the half-day's pay she begrudged, though we could ill afford it.

Drink, you see, was my father's great weakness. He could keep off it for months, even for years, at an end, and while he did he was as good as gold. He was a humorous, good-natured, industrious man, and over weeks a cross word would never pass his lips; he was first up in the morning and brought my mother a cup of tea in bed, stayed at home in the evenings and read the paper, saved money and bought himself a new suit of blue serge and a new bowler hat. He merely laughed at the folly of men who spent their hard-earned money on liquor, and sometimes, to pass an idle hour, he would take pencil and paper and calculate precisely how much he saved each week through being a teetotaller.

It was only later I realized that this in itself was a bad sign; a sign that he was becoming stuffed up with spiritual pride and imagining himself different from other men. His real danger-point was when he took a day off to celebrate, and indulged in one drink—just one drink of something harmless like lager—to show that he wasn't stuck-up and could take a drop with the next without making a fool of himself. That was the end of my da. By the time he had taken the first one he realized already that he had made a fool of himself; took a second to forget it, and a third to forget that he couldn't forget it; and then came home reeling drunk.

Next day he stayed away from work with a sick head, and within a fortnight was poor and savage and despairing again. Once he began he drank his way steadily through everything till he reached the kitchen clock. Mother and I knew all the phases and always dreaded the hour. Funerals were a danger.

"I have to go to Dunphy's to do a half-day's work," mother said in distress. "Who's going to look after Paddy?"

"I'll look after Paddy," said my father by way of a concession. "The walk will do him good."

My mother had no further objection to raise, though we all knew that I didn't need anyone to look after me, that the walk would do me no good, and that I was being attached to the party merely to act as a brake on my da. As a brake I had never achieved anything, but my mother had a pathetic faith in the effect of my charm and innocence.

Next day when I came in early from school my father had the kettle boiled and made tea for both of us. As my father's accomplishments didn't go beyond tea I refused a boiled egg. Afterwards we went down to the church, my father wearing his best blue serge and a bowler which he wore to one side of his close-cropped head with the least suggestion of rakishness. To his great joy he discovered Peter Crowley among the mourners. Peter was another danger signal as I well know from certain experiences after Mass on Sunday;

a mean man, as my mother said, who only went to funerals in the hope of free drinks; but my father had a weakness for him as one of those foolish people whom in his spiritual pride he pitied and despised.

It was a very good funeral from my father's point of view. He had it all well studied before we set off after the hearse in the afternoon sunlight.

"Five carriages!" he said in a tone of astonishment. "Five carriages and sixteen covered cars! There's one Alderman, two Town Councillors, a Dean and 'tis unknown how many priests. My goodness, I didn't see a funeral as big as this from the road since Willie Mack, the publican—God rest him!—died."

"Ah, he was a very respectable man," said Peter Crowley.

"Don't I know that well?" replied my father testily. "Sure, the man was one of my best friends. I was talking to him only two nights before he died. But I never imagined he was as well-connected as that."

My father was stepping out like a boy, interested in everything, the other mourners and the fine houses of the respectable locality through which we passed before we reached the Blarney Road. I knew the danger signals were present in full strength: a sunny day, a fine funeral and distinguished company were bringing out all the natural vanity and flightiness of his character. It was with something like genuine pleasure that he stood by poor Mr. Dooley's grave in the windy graveyard on top of the hill; with the sense of a duty fulfilled and a feeling of enormous relief that however much he might miss poor Mr. Dooley these long summer evenings, it was he and not Mr. Dooley would do the missing. That was something for a man to celebrate.

"We'll be making tracks before they break up," he whispered conspiratorially to Crowley as the grave-diggers began to toss in the first shovels of clay, and away with him, hopping like a goat from grave to grave to the gate.

The drivers, who were probably experiencing the same sensations though without months of abstinence to put an edge on them, looked up hopefully.

"Are they nearly finished?" bawled one.

"All over now but the last prayers," trumpeted my father joyously.

They passed us in a lather of dust several hundred yards from the pub, and my father, whose feet had a tendency to give him trouble in hot weather, quickened his pace, looking nervously over his shoulder to see if there was any sign of the main body of mourners crossing the ridge of the hill.

When we reached the pub the carriages were drawn up outside,

and two grave-looking men in mourning were cautiously carrying out glasses of porter and wine and delivering them to mysterious-looking female hands which reached out modestly from behind the drawn curtains of the mourning coaches. Inside there were only the drivers and a couple of old shawly women. I felt if I was going to act as a brake, now was the time.

" Daddy," I said, pulling him by the coat, " can't we go home now ? "

" In one minute now," he replied, beaming at me. " You must be thirsty after the long walk. We'll just have one bottle of lemonade and go home."

This was a bribe, and I knew it, but I was always a child of weak character. My father ordered two pints and a bottle of lemonade. I drank the lemonade at a gulp. That wasn't his way. He had long months of abstinence behind him. He took out his pipe, blew through it, filled it, and then lit it with loud pops, the eyes bulging from his head. Then he deliberately turned his back on his pint of porter, leaned his elbow on the counter almost in the attitude of a man ignoring it, delicately brushed the tobacco from his hands and began a long rigmarole about the funerals he had attended in his time. The carriages departed and other mourners drifted in till the pub was half full.

" Daddy," I said, pulling at his coat again, " can't we go home now ? "

" Ah, your mother won't be home for a long time yet," he said, glancing down at me affectionately. " Run out in the road and play."

I was always upset by the calm assumption of grown-ups that a child could play all by himself on a strange road. Boredom began to descend on me as it had so often done before. I knew my father was quite capable of staying there till nightfall while I snivelled with weariness and hunger. I knew I might have to bring him home, rolling drunk, down Blarney Lane with all the women at their doors saying, " Mick Delaney is on it again." I knew my mother would be half-crazy with anxiety ; that tomorrow my father wouldn't go to work and that before the end of the week she would be running to the pawnshop with the clock under her shawl. The lonesomeness of the kitchen without a clock always represented the last stage of misery to me.

I was still thirsty after the lemonade. I found that if I stood on tiptoe I could just reach my father's glass, and the fancy suddenly struck me to see what the porter tasted like. He had his back to it, and he wouldn't notice. I took down the glass and sipped. It tasted very bad to me. I couldn't imagine what pleasure he got out of it, more particularly when there was lemonade to be had.

My father was settling down for a real nice chat. I heard him say

that bands were a great addition to a funeral. He put his hands in the position of a man holding a rifle at the reverse and hummed a few bars of Chopin's Funeral March. I took a long drink and began to see that porter might have its points. I felt pleasantly elevated and philosophic. My father hummed a few bars of the Beethoven Funeral March. It was a nice pub and a nice funeral, and I felt sure poor Mr. Dooley in Heaven must have been very well pleased with it. I was sorry he hadn't had a band for I liked a bit of music myself.

But the really delightful thing about porter was that it enabled you to stand aside, or rather to float aloft like a cherub on a cloud, and watch yourself with your legs crossed, leaning against the counter, thinking deep grown-up thoughts. By the time I had finished the pint I found it hard to put back the glass; the counter seemed to have got higher. Melancholia was supervening again.

"Well," said my father piously, reaching behind him for the glass and raising it, "God rest the poor man's soul wherever he is." He stopped, looked incredulously at the glass and then at the people nearest him. "Hallo," he said, as if he were still prepared to consider it as a joke, "who was at my glass?"

"Erra, there was no one at your glass, my good man," said one of the shawly women with an offended air. "Is it robbers you think we are?"

"Someone drank that while my back was turned," he snarled, deciding that this was something more than a joke.

"If they did, they were them that were nearer you than us," said the old woman darkly, giving me a suspicious look, and at the same moment the truth dawned on my father. He bent down and shook me.

"What ails you, little boy?" he asked anxiously.

Peter Crowley looked at me, too, and began to grin.

"Could you beat that?" he asked in a husky voice.

I could, without difficulty. I started to get sick. My father jumped away from me in terror lest I might spoil his new suit and then opened the back door for me.

"Run! run!" he said.

I saw the sunlit wall outside, with the ivy overhanging it, and made straight for it. The intention was good but the performance was exaggerated because I lurched right into the wall, hurting it badly as it seemed to me, but I had other things to think of besides the wall.

My father, still concerned for his suit, came behind me and held me up while I got sick.

"That's a good boy," he said encouragingly. "You'll be grand when you get that up."

But I wasn't grand. Grand was the last thing I was. I gave one

unmerciful wail out of me as he steered me back to the pub and put me sitting on the bench beside the shawlies. They drew themselves up with an offended air. They were still sore about the suggestion that they had drunk my father's pint.

" Isn't it the likes of them would be left in charge of poor unfortunate children ? " said one. " 'Tis in charge of the police the most of them should be."

" Mick," said the publican in alarm, coming out to spray more sawdust on the floor, " that child isn't supposed to be in here at all. You'd better get him home quick in case a bobby comes."

" God Almighty," whimpered my father, raising his eyes to heaven and clapping his hands silently as he did when he was deeply upset, " what'll his mother say ? . . . This," he snarled suddenly, " is what comes of women going out to work instead of stopping at home and looking after their children . . . Are the carriages gone, Bill ? "

" Oh, the carriages are all gone," said the publican.

" All right," snapped my father, " I'll take him home . . . I'll never again bring you out," he said to me. " Here," he added, handing me the coloured handkerchief from his breast pocket, " put that over your eye and hide it."

It was only when I put the handkerchief to my face and it stuck that I realized I was cut and set up another wail.

" Whisht, whisht, whisht ! " my father said testily, steering me out of the door. " One'd think you were killed. That'll be nothing. We'll wash it when we get you home."

" Steady now, old scout," said Crowley, taking the other side of me. " You'll be all right in a minute."

I never met two men who knew less about the effects of porter. The fresh air and hot sun only made me groggier than ever, and I reeled between them till my father started to whimper again.

" Oho, God Almighty, and the whole road out ! Oho, what misfortune was on me not to stop at my work ! . . . Can't you walk straight ? "

I couldn't, though I saw as plain as he did that, coaxed by the sunlight, every woman in Blarney Lane was either leaning over her half-door or sitting on her doorstep, and that they all stopped their gabbling when they saw the strange spectacle of two middle-aged sober men bringing home an intoxicated small boy with a cut over his eye.

My father, torn between the shamefaced desire to get me home as quick as he could and the neighbourly need for explaining that it wasn't his fault that I was in such a condition, stopped outside old Mrs. Roche's to tell his sad tale.

I leaned against the wall of the house with my hands in my

trousers pockets. There were a couple of old women outside a door at the opposite side of the road. I thought of poor Mr. Dooley laid in his cold grave in the Curragh, who would never walk down the road again and began softly to sing a favourite song of my father's.

Though lost to Mononia and cold in the grave
He returns to Kincora no more.

"Wisha, the poor child," said Mrs. Roche in great amusement. "Haven't he a lovely voice, God bless him!"

"Whisht, now, whisht," said my father, raising his finger to me. It surprised me that he didn't show more appreciation of his favourite song, considering the appropriateness of it. "We're nearly home now. I'll carry you the rest of the way."

But drunk and all as I was, I knew better than to be brought home in somebody's arms.

"Now," I said severely, "can't you leave me alone? I can walk all right. 'Tis only my head. All I want is a rest."

"You can rest in bed at home," he said, trying to pick me up.

"And what do I want to go home for?" I said crossly, pushing him off. "Why the hell can't you let me alone?"

For some reason the old women at the other side of the road thought this was very funny. It annoyed me considerably, to think a fellow couldn't have a drop taken without the whole neighbourhood coming out to make game of him.

"Who are ye laughing at?" I shouted, clenching my fists. "I'll soon make ye laugh at the other side of yeer faces if ye don't let me pass."

They thought that was funnier still.

"Whisht, whisht, whisht, I tell you," my father snapped, dropping all pretence of amusement and dragging me along by the hand. I was maddened by the shrieks of those women. I tried to dig in my heels but he was too strong for me and I could only see them at all by looking back over my shoulder.

"Leave me at them!" I shouted. "Leave me at them and I'll cure them. I'll make them stop inside and wash their dirty faces!"

"'Twill be all over the road," whimpered my father again. "Oho, oho, never again, never again, not if I lived to be a thousand!"

When we got home Peter Crowley, who knew where he was wanted, cleared off and my father undressed me and put me to bed. I couldn't sleep because of the whirling in my head. It was very unpleasant and I got sick again. My father came in with a wet cloth and mopped it up.

I lay there in a fever, listening to him chopping sticks to start a fire. After that he laid the table. Suddenly the front door banged

open and my mother stormed in, not her usual timid self but a wild, raging woman.

"Mick Delaney," she cried hysterically, "what did you do to my son?"

"Whisht, whisht, whisht," he began to hiss, dancing from one foot to the other in terror lest the neighbours might hear. "There's nothing the matter with him, only a little scrape over his eye."

"A scrape over his eye!" she repeated. "What do you mean, filling the unfortunate child with drink to make sport for yourself and that other dirty, rotten, filthy brute?"

"But I tell you, woman," he shouted indignantly, "I gave him no drink. He took it while my back was turned. What the hell do you think I am?"

"God forgive you," she said bitterly. "By this time the whole road knows what you are. God forgive you, wasting our hard-earned couple of ha'pence in public-houses, training your child up to be a drunken corner-boy like yourself!"

Then she swept into the bedroom and threw herself on her knees by the bed. She moaned when she saw the state of my eye. My father appeared in the bedroom door with his cap down over his eyes and a look of the most intense self-pity on his face.

"That's a nice way to talk to me after all I went through," he whined. "That's a nice accusation to make, that I was drinking. How the hell could I be drinking when he drank the whole lot on me? I'm the one that ought to be pitied with my day ruined on me and after being made a laughing-stock for the whole road."

But next morning, when he got up and went out quietly with his work-basket, my mother threw herself on me and kissed me. I was having a holiday from school till my eye got better.

"My brave little man!" she said with her eyes shining. "'Twas God did it you were there. You were his guardian angel."

* * *

COINCIDENCE

A lady at a London dinner party once said to Lord Northcliffe, "Thackeray awoke one morning and found himself famous."

"When that morning dawned," answered Northcliffe, "Thackeray had been writing eight hours a day for fifteen years. The man who wakes up and finds himself famous, Madam, hasn't been sleeping."

This Week Magazine

YEAR OF THE PHYLLOXERA

"I think," she said quietly, "it is God's will"

by MARY GALLATI

IL VECCHIONE was sitting on the wooden bench alongside his property. It was good red soil, richer than all the gold; it let the vines spring and the peaches blossom and the figs ripen. And there were those fine extra acres he'd bought for the sake of the clear running brook. Il Vecchione mopped his sweating brow with a red spotted handkerchief and waited for the hot sun to set. In one hand he held a solid walking stick made of cherrywood, and the other hand was clenched a little, nervously on the alert. They were wrinkled bony hands. His high-cheekboned face was engraved with the lines of maturity, the mouth was wide, and his eyes were brown and alight as torches, flooding his face with a wise simplicity.

"Waiting for Ricardo?"

It was the old man's good friend, Nino.

Achille nodded. His name was Achille Bottincellini but most people knew him by his nickname Il Vecchione, the Old Man. He screwed up his eyes in suspicion. "How did you know he was coming home?"

Nino laughed. His teeth were yellow and rotten but he had an engaging dimple in his chin.

"You told me. Don't you remember, last night, when we were playing cards? Or perhaps you prefer to forget you lost those two games of Briscola and still owe me a bottle of Chianti, eh?"

"Bah! Scoundrel! You would play cards over my grave!" grumbled Il Vecchione. He became serious. "But my son—" He looked away.

Nino paused a little.

"Why is Ricardo coming home? Is he tired at last of being boxed up in that office like a rabbit in a hutch? Is it a holiday the town parasites have given him?"

"He needs a rest, Nino." Il Vecchione shook his head disapprovingly.

"Hah! I knew it! You can't live like a rabbit all day *and* a dog all night!"

" Are you suggesting—" Il Vecchione brandished his stick.

" No, no, I am doing nothing of the kind," said Nino swiftly. " But I am happy I have no property or I too should be worried, with an only son who has no interest in the land." His blue eyes twinkled. " Ciaou ! "

Nino saluted in farewell and strolled away, gradually merging with the haze, the distant trees and the mauve and red and gold sunset.

As Nino departed, another figure appeared in the distance. He was slight and delicate, with the melancholy eyes of a lap-dog. His face was not so much tired as bored ; his lips were thin, curled, and indetermined, and his nose short and straight. He wore a lounge suit, soft collar and flowing dark tie. He held a suitcase in one hand. His steps were light and quick.

Nearer, nearer, he came.

Il Vecchione rose.

" Hello, Papa, did you receive my letter ? "

" Yes," said Il Vecchione. " There is a meal waiting for you at home."

After the risotto, made with rice from the local marshes and saffron and tomatoes from their land, Anna brought the coffee. As usual, it was excellent. Anna was Nino's niece and beyond reproach. She had looked after Il Vecchione since his wife died three years ago. An eighteen-year-old lass of stocky peasant build, she had the finely chiselled features of a Michelangelo masterpiece. She had long wavy brown hair and her eyes were startlingly round and innocent.

Often Il Vecchione would stare at her and imagine his stillborn daughter might have been like this. If only he hadn't married too late in life. He loved little Anna in a cool deep way, the love of a father.

He watched Anna clear away the cups, her dark apron swinging with her as she went. Vaguely, he heard Ricardo's high-pitched voice.

" Now, Papa, I tell you Jules Verne is great—"

His eyes rested on him. How apathetic Ricardo was. He wanted to see him grow strong like the vines he trimmed and tended. It was too late, he thought.

" Mm ? " Il Vecchione pretended to be interested and remembered that his late wife had a Count for a grandfather. A Count who gambled and squandered everything. A man of noble blood who had degenerated into weakness and futility. Oh pray God Ricardo would not be the same.

" His works will live on when we are dead."

" So will the good earth," said Il Vecchione. " Good night."

Next morning, at the sound of the early swallow, father and son made their way to the vineyards on the highest summit. Halfway up the hill the road forked, one way leading to Achille's property, the other to that owned by Roberto Vallini.

"See," pointed Il Vecchione with his stick, "Roberto has enlarged his property. It stretches now to the Mount of the Madonna."

Ricardo shrugged his shoulders. Every time he came home it was the same. That's why he didn't come often. Always he was a child, a child. When would his father realise he was twenty-five—a man.

"I am not well, Papa . . . Please remember. And I have come up here today for fresh air, not for a lecture."

Il Vecchione pretended not to hear.

"But, then, Roberto Vallini has a son who helps him."

At the top they could see the whole countryside stretched around the village down below. The bell-tower, the winding river, the ponies and traps, and the people dotted here and there like toys; oxen slowly winding their way up or down the hillsides. Il Vecchione felt a strange sense of power and simplicity. Was that how God felt when He looked at us? Oh God, he found himself praying, can You not make my son a tiller of Your soil? That is all I ask before I die."

"Come over here and rest by the Chapel." Ricardo helped his father towards the old seat, then sat down himself. Papa, he thought, is getting old, muttering to himself now.

They made an odd pair against the background of the round Chapel dedicated to the memory of a Saint, a saint who had given up all his riches for the aged and the sick.

"Bruno is with us still."

"Ah! I am glad! He was always so good to me. I remember he used to give me a bunch of grapes on the sly when I came here to play."

"The rascal. He knew he shouldn't."

They both laughed, stayed a little while longer in the sunshine, then inspected the vineyards bearing the fruit which had provided man with food and drink since the dawn of history. Bruno, their head man, was worried. The grapes were not good, he said. The crops were poor.

"Not every year can be the same," Ricardo pointed out.

But Bruno shook his head.

They picnicked together on bread and salami and wine; Il Vecchione and Bruno discussing the grapes, Ricardo relaxing.

It was on Sunday, after the market in the Piazza, that Il Vecchione

and his friends would meet. Their weekday boots would be exchanged for shiny shoes, working clothes for smart jacket and drainpipe trousers, working pullover replaced by boiled shirt with flat collars, a silk cord tied into a bow at the neck flowing into pom-poms, and instead of a cap, a soft felt hat.

In the main café, Dante, Toni, Piero and others would have a drink or two. Perhaps Signor Strozzi, the owner and also a friend, might buy them a round. They'd discuss politics, their King, the secret societies which defied the law. And look at the anarchist up the road! Last week they had tried to catch him, and they searched his house for incriminating papers; there were the King's soldiers outside pointing their rifles at the house, but the man had been too clever and he had burnt the evidence.

"Terrible the way he lets his children starve."

"Give him his due, he's an idealist."

"Maybe one day no-one will fear these agitators."

"We will always fear something."

"What we farmers need is science, not only patience and labour."

The main door swung open as if a gale were blowing.

Bruno, with several other men charged in. Bruno's olive face was twitching with excitement. His arms were outstretched as if to plead attention.

"Listen, all of you. We have dreadful news." He stopped, seeming to choke. The café proprietor and his customers stared at him anxiously.

Bruno spoke gravely.

"The Phylloxera is with us."

The news exploded like a bomb. They were stunned by its impact. They'd heard how in Bordeaux, France, the peasants couldn't understand why the crops diminished, why the grapes dried up and the vine leaves curled.

So that was it!

Il Vecchione shuddered. "You are sure?" he asked, his eyes wide, frightened.

"Yes, yes. That is why the vines are stunted; why they bear fewer and smaller leaves."

There was no more time to lose. Everyone connected with the land, and others who were just curious, followed Bruno and the men. As they made their way along the main Via, the news spread.

Day by day the villagers gathered to watch the vineyards. To their dismay, the rumour was confirmed by ominous patches where the disease was advanced. Leaves were discoloured, and there were wrinkled hairy galls on their under surface. No more

did the men talk of the King or of the anarchist up the road. The Phylloxera! *The Phylloxera!*

The dread subject gripped them as tightly as a band of steel day and night. The pest would ruin their wine produce, their livelihood. How *could* they live without the vineyards?

Groping for knowledge, many listened to Ricardo, Il Vecchione's son, who claimed he'd studied agriculture in the big town and knew what they must do.

"When a vineyard is destroyed by the Phylloxera bug it cannot be replanted immediately," he told them. He was eager to impart his knowledge. "The soil has to be cleansed; left fallow or cropped before new vines can be replanted. And we must all do this at the *same time.*"

They gathered round closer, closer. Roberto Vallini's tall sturdy son, his head rising above the others, shouted in protest.

"Hey!" he said. "What can you—from the town—know about the land!"

Ricardo reddened with anger. He didn't care for the land. He didn't care for these people. But he wasn't going to let that ignorant Vallini get away with it. There was a surge within him of new found strength.

"If," he went on, ignoring young Vallini, "the vineyard next to yours is a breeding ground for the pest, it's no use encouraging it by planting new vines in your earth." His voice was thin and reedy in his excitement.

There were murmurs of dissent from the crowd, and Ricardo banged his fisted right hand onto the palm of his left.

"Don't you know that many small landowners abroad were finished, ruined, because they couldn't carry on during the time that had to pass before replacement?"

"What do you suggest we do? All get nice and friendly?"

It was young Vallini, laughing, his white teeth flashing, and hands on hips. Others tittered.

Ricardo broke his way through the crowd and left them in disgust.

At home, Anna was sewing placidly. The aura of peace around her comforted him.

"Oh, I didn't expect you back so soon. I will get you something to eat."

"No, no. I will wait for my father. Do go on sewing . . . please."

His eyes held hers. He noticed for the first time that they were golden brown and rich as velvet. She lowered them quickly and blushed.

"Very well." She continued the needlework.

"What do you think of the Phylloxera, Anna?"

"I think—I think—it is God's will," she said quietly, almost in a whisper.

As simple as that!

"Although the Priest says if we give him lots of contributions he will get some special blessed dust and sprinkle it over our soil."

"And all will be well."

There was faint mockery in Ricardo's voice. He knew the handsome fair-haired Don Stefano, who had been awaiting for years the chance to build a new altar.

Ricardo's eyes twinkled but he said no more until his father came in.

Il Vecchione was tired and ill. The tide of life was visibly ebbing away from him since the arrival of the dread Phylloxera. How could the Heavens permit this evil? Was there not enough worry already in his household? Was he not too feeble to fight against it?

"Anna, bring me the Bible."

It was dusk, and lively shadows flickered round the old man in the candlelight. As he took the large Bible Anna handed to him and opened it out, Ricardo noticed his pallor.

Achille read aloud, as he was wont to do before the evening meal.

When your fear cometh as desolation, and your destruction cometh as a whirlwind; when distress and anguish cometh upon you, then shall they call upon me, but I will not answer; they shall seek me early, but they shall not find me: For that they hated knowledge, and did not choose the fear of the Lord; they would none of my counsel; they despised all my reproof. Therefore shall they eat of the fruit of their own way, and be filled with their own devices. For the turning away of the simple shall slay them, and the prosperity of fools shall destroy them. But whoso hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil.

Anna and Ricardo looked across at each other.

The happenings of the next few weeks were strange indeed.

Don Stefano had secured his contributions and his parishioners eagerly awaited the blessed dust from the South. It arrived on a bright Tuesday morning and was distributed with due solemnity. Nino was one of the first to collect it and, with a face shining with fervour, insisted that Achille's head man, Bruno, should use it despite his reluctance. Achille was in bed ill.

In the highways and byways, all the talk was of the dust. Soon their troubles would be over. Piero, who sold the *ciambelli* in the Piazza, the biscuit rings strung like a garland which the children loved to hang around their necks, was so sure that the Phylloxera would disappear that he made a bet with a golden coin. Some of the villagers even celebrated, in advance, the joyous idea of victory, and the carabinieri found themselves with more work than they could ever remember. Every night now they made arrests, and surely such a thing hadn't happened for a generation! And in the meantime wives and mothers and sweethearts grumbled amiably over their cooking, sewing or washing.

Don Stefano was the inspiration and the handsome blue-eyed Priest could do no wrong.

Meanwhile, Ricardo was agitating for what he believed was common sense and, once unpopular for his long absences from the village, he was unpopular now because he showed too much interest. Franco Vallini still laughed at his suggestion that they should co-operate.

"Go ahead yourself," he said.

Ricardo did. At the break of dawn, after a bowl of coffee and milk and a hunk of freshly baked bread, he would set off. Sometimes he would inspect the wine cellars first, the store where the many round bottles lay on their sides, with the wine covering the cork and excluding all air, so that the wine could develop and mature. Then he would go and work with a will, alongside Bruno and his men.

"Why, Signor Ricardo, I thought you were not well. The tables have turned, have they not?" Bruno would smile and there was pleasure in his voice. The young master was not, after all, chicken-hearted as he'd been led to believe. Or had the Phylloxera stirred some latent love of the land in his youthful veins?

"I have good news for you this morning. Signor Roberto Vallini is prepared to adopt your suggestion."

Ricardo was excited.

"You mean—"

"He has confirmed it with the city experts and authorities and will co-operate with us," said Bruno.

"And what about Franco?"

"What about him! After all, the property is his father's."

It would have done Achille's failing heart good to see his son and the men working together, straw hats protecting them from the sun, stopping only to eat or to shout a greeting.

The system of spraying a solution of copper sulphate mixed with lime, on the leaves of the vines, helped to save from destruction

the bunches of grapes in bloom, and it prevented the leaves from curling. But the real site of the disease was to be found deep in the roots of the vines. The European Hybrid grape was not thought strong enough to withstand this fiercely destroying disease, and the best cure was to graft the regional vines with an American Hybrid, Vitis Riparia, V. Rupestris, or V. Berlandieri. And they let the healthier vines grow on so that the vineyards would not be left quite destitute.

Anna, worried at the thought of the blisters and cuts on their hands, often climbed the hill in the sweltering heat with a basket containing clean linen and iodine, and extra food and drink for the men.

Watering the steep slope was a problem. There was the running brook at the bottom, and there was the well in the far right hand corner of the vineyard, but the water had to be carried long distances, and the sweat poured down the men's faces and backs with the effort.

However, when the hardest work was nearly over, the sky dimmed. The Madonna blue changed to a dusky grey of rolling cloud. It all happened so quickly that Anna, who had just left the vineyard, was caught in a downpour which would have drenched her to the skin if she had not found shelter in the little wooden tool-shed on the Vallinis' land. She flung the door open and closed it behind her.

" Can I help you, Signorina Anna ? "

She turned round. The wind blew the door open again as she recognized Franco Vallini. He heaved himself against the door. This time it shut tight.

" Thank you, thank you," said Anna. She was wary, for she distrusted Franco Vallini. His eyes frightened her : they were long and narrow, and she never could decide whether he was sideglancing, looking down or straight at her.

There was nowhere to sit, and he seemed to be standing very close to her. He must have noticed her fear for she was breathing quickly. The rain pelted onto the wooden roof. Lucky that she had found shelter in time. No doubt Ricardo and the others would shelter too. She put down the conical basket with the large curved handle. Her golden ear-rings dangled with the movement. She looked up at Franco. She tried to smile. But his face was like a young bull's. Nostrils dilated and quivering. His eyes . . . she wasn't quite sure, but they seemed to be staring at . . . at her blouse. Of course ! Her blouse ! It had unlaced somehow in all the confusion. She was terrified.

" No—don't—" she found herself saying.

It was too late. Franco pressed her to him with a power and

might she could not understand. She struggled against the pressure of his lips against hers.

He released her after what seemed an eternity and thrust her roughly against a wall.

" Stupid little one. Haven't you learned anything about life yet ! " he said.

Anna was dazed and bewildered. She tried to smooth back her hair. Vaguely she realized that the rainstorm was gentler now.

" Haven't you ever watched animals mating ? Or do you want to go on wasting your time ! "

Anna looked beyond him at the door, the way of escape. Her heart leapt. Ricardo was standing there. Ricardo. She knew he'd come.

His face was waxen and his hands were strangely clenched.

" I saw you, Anna, from the top, and thought you'd like me to take you home."

Franco swung round.

" Get out ! " he ordered. " I'll look after Anna."

Why Ricardo should want to fight an opponent who so obviously could batter him to death it was difficult to say. But this monster had jibed at him and laughed at his ideas. Ricardo braced himself, then struck the momentarily astonished Franco with his bare fist.

He fought with all his might, heard Anna screaming during the scuffle, then found himself on the floor feeling exhausted and weak.

Franco laughed.

" See, the crettino is on the floor and cannot get up ! Come along, Anna, leave him be."

In actual fact, Franco knew he hadn't hurt him much.

Anna's lips were held tight, then suddenly, " I hate you, Franco Vallini," she said vehemently. " I hate you as much as if you were the devil in person ! "

Franco's mouth hung loose. He seemed about to say something, but instead he went without another word.

Anna bent down beside Ricardo.

" It's all right," she whispered gently, " just a few cuts and bruises, I believe."

Ricardo stared at her. " Oh, Anna," he said sadly, " I was foolish. But I couldn't bear the idea of his having hurt you." He paused, " Or even touched you." Then, as if in final surrender, " I love you," he said, " I love you."

Anna laughed and her laughter sounded as merry as the musical-box on the mantelshelf at home. She produced the bandaging from the basket.

" There now," she said, " who would have thought I'd ever use it for this purpose ? "

After the storm, the sunshine broke out again but, with the change of the season, a cool breeze fanned the trees and the myriad flowers around the village.

Don Stefano's credit was not very high in the eyes of the villagers, and the dreamy-eyed shoemaker who played the guitar so well, composed a new serenade :

From dust we come,
To dust we go,
But the dust of Don Stefano
Where did it blow ?
Don Stefano ! Don Stefano !
We love you just the same ;
Don Stefano ! Don Stefano !

It was sung and whistled along the cobbled streets, in garden, in vineyard, in workshop, in villa.

Handsome Don Stefano was imperturbable and he told them at Sunday Mass that if the blessed dust had failed it was for some good reason. Yes, now the money left over from the contributions could provide the new altar they had all been waiting for so long. He clasped his hands and smiled down on them from the pulpit.

Indeed he was right and who would dare to argue ? Especially now that the village was receiving every official aid towards the recovery of their beloved vineyards.

In the meantime Ricardo had lost his listlessness and boredom. He felt fit and happy and, as he often remarked to his father who appeared to be a little better these days, he was deeply intrigued by the battle of the Phylloxera. The work on the land was not only manual ; it was scientific. And he was going to give up his office job.

In the winter the earth was too muddy to work. Most of the villagers closed their shutters and hibernated like moles ; perhaps after a heavy meal of polenta or spaghetti they would play card games—scopa or briscola—around the fire while the chestnuts were roasting. It was often icy cold and sometimes snow fell, covering the village as thickly as a white wool carpet.

On one cold evening, Anna ran to fetch her uncle, Nino.

" Quickly ! " she gasped. " Quickly ! "

" What is it, my child ? "

"Il Vecchione is sick—very sick." She huddled closer into her heavy shawl, her face pale with fear.

Nino put on a shabby overcoat, placed an arm round her, and together they went across the field leading to Achille's home.

The inky sky was starlit and beautiful. Their boots left neat patterns on the virgin snow, but Anna and Nino saw nothing, said nothing.

Ricardo and white-bearded Dottor Antonio were at the old man's bedside.

Nino saw with dismay the intensified pallor of Il Vecchione's face. He was ashen. His vivid brown eyes were hollow and sunken. Somehow, perhaps because the need was so strong, he gathered the strength to speak. "Nino—you have—come."

"Yes."

Outside the door, Don Stefano, black as a rock in his long gown and round hat, was waiting to give the last Sacrament. Dottor Antonio joined him. Ricardo, Anna and Nino came closer.

"I am proud, my son, for now you are a tiller of the soil. It is in your blood. It gave your ancestors bread and will give you and yours bread. It is the true . . . life. I am proud of you." Achille slowly stretched out his hands. "I am proud of you."

Ricardo clasped the outstretched hands.

"Father!" he cried, and he felt his father's grip loosen.

"Nino," Achille whispered, "he and Anna . . . going to be . . . married . . ."

The tears streamed down Anna's cheeks. She was sure she would sob for ever and ever. Even when Dottor Antonio came in with Don Stefano and the three drifted slowly into the living room, Anna couldn't stop.

Ricardo walked across to the window and opened it. It was midnight. In the distance a band of villagers could be heard singing,

From dust we come,
To dust we go;
But the dust of Don Stefano
Where did it blow?

* * *

LEST OLD ACQUAINTANCE—

Experience is a marvellous thing. It enables you to recognise a mistake whenever you make it again.

F.P.J.

FELICITY

Sweet—

Now I dunno dat ole Brer Rabbit wuz hard-hearted er cole-blooded any mo' dan de common run er de creeturs, but hit look like he kin see mo' ter tickle 'im dan de udders, en he wuz constant a-laffin'.

Mos' er de time he'd laff in his innerds, but den agin w'en sumpin tetch his funny-bone, he'd open up wid a big *ha-ha-ha* dat 'ud make de udder creeturs take ter de bushes.

En dat wuz de way he done w'en ole Craney-crow had his head tooken off fer ter be in de fashion. He laff en laff twel it hu't 'im ter laff, en den he laff some mo' fer good medjur. He laffed plump twel mawnin', en den he laff w'iles he wuz rackin' 'long todes home. He'd lope a little ways en den he'd set down by de side er de road en laff some mo'.

JOEL CHANDLER HARRIS, 1848-1908,
Told by Uncle Remus

Are the Thoughts—

God grant us, now and then, what Gipsies most desire : foolish Gentiles to deceive, jolly porkers to poison, steeds to be stolen.
May God bestow on us good red meat and black, plenty of fat capons, plenty of fine hares, plenty of dead pig.
May the Devil take all Magistrates ! may the Devil take all Gamekeepers ! To the Devil with harsh Sentences ! To the Devil with the Bridewell ! And may the Devil take all Policemen !

JOHN SAMPSON, *The Romani Gaudeamus*

That Savour—

Some of my friends, looking back upon their life, will say with pride, " I have made a million pounds," or " I have become an earl " . . . Others will point to the ripe, wise books they have compiled ; to the faded pictures of young girls they enjoyed ; to the skins of the beasts they have slain. Most of these, being fortunate men, lived as they elected to live : and I must suppose that in this they were happy.

I, looking down upon the Vale and toward the hills, look also upon my own life, which has been singularly void of beasts, baronies, or beauties . . . There stand my conquests and my trophies, my wisdom, wealth, and happiness . . .

I can say what village waits hidden behind that clump of firs, and I can recite pat the names of the gallant squires whose brasses rest before the altar. I see a wain wending through a thin bylane, and with eyes closed I can chart the waggoner's course—by such-and-such a hillock, where the crocus burns blue behind the bank, down the steep dip, and over the narrow bridge where dace rise to brown bread through June gloaming . . .

And on that lean hill, juniper-clad, and dedicated to the rabbits, I met my millenium, and beheld my young heart float upon the morning air for joy's sake. That track knows me, for the mark of my feet is set upon it for ever, and the seal of the setting stamped with love's insignia . . .

J. H. B. PEEL, *Small Calendars*

Of Content

My shadow is ten yards high ;
I am as big as the giant of Cerne Abbas
Or the Long Man of Wilmington.
I march astride golden shocks of cut corn
And between my thighs is all the fruitfulness of the earth.
I am the farm worker going home at evening.

E. M. BARRAUD

The Quiet Mind—

More has built near London, upon the Thames, a modest yet commodious mansion. There he lives surrounded by his numerous family, including his wife, his son, and his son's wife, his three daughters and their husbands, with eleven grandchildren. There is not any man living so affectionate to his children as he, and he loveth his old wife as if she were a girl of fifteen.

ERASMUS, 1466-1536,
writing of Sir Thomas More

Is Richer—

A happy man or woman is a better thing to find than a five-pound note.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON, 1850-1894

Than—

Shoving and pushing, and pushed and shoved, a dishonoured bag of bones about London, or carted like a herring in a box through tunnels in the clay beneath it, as I bump my head in an omnibus, or hang, half-suffocated, from a greasy strap in the Underground, I dream, like other Idealists and Saints and Social Thinkers, of a better world than this, of a City of Heaven brought down at last to earth. One footman flings open the portals of my palace in that New Jerusalem for me; another unrolls a path of velvet to the enormous motor which floats me, swift and silent, through the city traffic, I leaning back like God on beatific cushions, smoking a big cigar.

LOGAN PEARSALL SMITH, *Trivia*

A Crown

Hear this:
It was told of a man,
He had lived so long in the wood
He knew all
That they said in the trees—
Had fared so long
Those meadows and those hills,
His tread was a dark legend
With the moles.

All the years' days, unvarying,
First as the curlew, he would come,
Measure the wind and the sky,
Whistle his dog, and be gone
By the same same road.

. . . Sometimes it rained,
And then his beard would knit
Swift rivulets.

Just that, my friend.
So many many years
The man and a dog.

Even the chimes, they say,
Copied their strength, their rhymes
From these two
Who followed the straight of their way,
Having something to do.

WILLIAM BOX

TOUCHING WOOD

"I'm not exactly a superstitious man—and yet—"

by OSBERT SITWELL

I DO not yet know how this story ends: for what I am going to tell you happened only yesterday morning, before I left the boat at Suez.

With a pile of books and an empty soup-cup beside me, I sat in a deck-chair, staring out into mist-edged nothingness, where not even a dolphin or a flying-fish leapt for the diversion of the passengers. Everything seemed to be warm and damp, very damp. The edge of the sky was hung with ragged banners of cloud, and the edge of the sea melted into it. My neighbour, also with several books by his side, and one lying open upon his knee, stared, with a similar fixity, into the watery, empty perspective. The vast melancholy of the sea—only supportable because of the laziness it engenders, and of the manner in which it causes one day to telescope into another, inducing in many persons the subsequent conviction that they must have enjoyed the voyage for the time to have passed so quickly—hung over both of us: that much was clear.

Tall, thin, and with rather fine hands, my neighbour displayed in his physique an unusual sensitiveness, and I wondered, idly, who he was . . . The books afforded no clue, for they were of several sorts; a translation of the Greek Anthology, a novel by P. G. Wodehouse, Dunne's *Experiment With Time*, a new biography of some dead diplomat by Mr. Harold Nicolson, a volume of short stories by the late D. H. Lawrence, and—I noticed now—one of my own books, *The Man Who Lost Himself*. Suddenly he turned his eyes from the water and addressed me.

"Do you *like* the sea?" he asked.

"Yes, I love it, in a way," I answered, "in spite of the boredom—and, with me, alas! of the terror. For I'm quite a good sailor: but when other people are lying in their bunks, wishing they could drown, I'm lying, fully dressed, on mine, praying that I shan't, and thinking of the wastes of water on which a man's head would be almost imperceptible. That's why I prefer the Mediterranean, where you can usually see land . . . But it seems to have disappeared altogether today . . . Or, better still, give me the Suez Canal; I look forward to an enjoyable afternoon."

"Oh, I know: I'm a bit like that myself," he said. "In fact,

I'll tell you a story about it. But I hope you're not superstitious?

"Perhaps you can hardly call it a story, really," he added; "it's an illustration, more than a story, or the proof of a theory . . . And in this instance the theory or the moral is the old, obvious one, that what you *feel* is—and must always be—more true than what you merely think. But people don't have the courage nowadays to act on what they feel: they act by reason, and then try to invent rational explanations afterwards, of the singular things that happen to them. But it's no use: no use at all.

"The ship, bound for South America, left Tilbury on a wet December afternoon: but the next day and for two days afterwards the sea, even when we crossed the Bay of Biscay, resembled a blue summer lake. In spite of the calm, though, we were late in arriving at Lisbon, while, once there, the interminable arguments of the harbour authorities seemed specially calculated to make us later still in leaving it. I stood, watching the departing passengers, and listening to a fierce Portuguese quarrel that spluttered like a damp firework, between the ship's agent and a custom-house official.

"There were only two new arrivals of whom to take notice, an Englishwoman and her husband. She was certainly beautiful in a curious way, like one of the Fates. Her eyes, wide open, had the blue depths of an oracle, in which many meanings, one true and many false, could be read. There was something classical, or pre-classical, about that startled and stony visage, something of Cassandra. Something, too, I thought—or should I say, I felt?—at the time, of a mermaid: for her eyes belonged to the sea.

"And yet it was at Mycenae, in the broken palace above the deep ravine, on that hill which seems to be alone for ever with the sea and the sky, as though they were washing it free of that doom, and the taint that caused it, that she would have been, I think, most at home . . . Beside her, her husband looked pleasantly matter-of-fact: but it was only her appearance which was unusual; her clothes seemed specially designed to destroy the particular kind of beauty she possessed, to degrade it and make it ordinary.

"The following morning, sitting on deck, as we are now, I found myself next to them, and, after playing for a while with our books in the listless manner which the movement and vibration of all ships—for there is a very strong link between sea-sickness and print—enforce, we began to talk a little . . . They gave an ordinary enough impression, too, when they spoke, and her voice—quiet, busy, comfortable, though rather empty—had no element in it of either prophecy or tragedy. And yet I knew, I felt, I was *aware*—informed, I suppose, by the exploring of those antennae which so much excel the faculties of the mind—that, somehow or other, she was inextricably associated with these qualities.

"We talked in a desultory manner for two hours or more, and during the whole of that time the sea, which had been up till now so unruffled—even in those latitudes where you would have expected it to be at its most swelling and boisterous—began indubitably to show increasing symptoms of a change of mood. It felt as though it were trying out its powers, though only, as yet, with some future occasion in view. Little winds whistled in the corners, and there was a roll on the boat that caused the usual jokes and laughter among the younger passengers, tramping noisily round the deck, and instilled in the players of quoits and other games a desire to be more hearty and jolly than ever, in order to cover up a certain incipient queasiness . . . You ask what we'd been talking about? Well, I forget, but all sorts of things, politics and books—safe, dull books—and travel.

"With every minute, though, conversation became more difficult, for there were sounds of things crashing from time to time, and the wind howled ever more loudly, though ours was a comparatively sheltered corner. They were going, she told me, to Buenos Aires—or 'B-A,' as she called it, with her affectation of ordinariness—for the voyage, weren't even going on shore for a day or two at Rio.

"Mr. Ruevinny—for that was their name—had been ill, it appeared, and had been ordered this voyage by the doctor. 'I tried to persuade my wife not to come,' he explained, 'but she insisted. I didn't persuade you to come, did I, darling?' he added, turning to her, 'I did everything I could to stop you.'

"No, I don't recall the whole conversation with any distinctness: only one or two things like that. I remember Mrs. Ruevinny saying, in her practical, putting-up-with-no-nonsense and yet singularly empty voice—a voice which said things as though it did not mean them—'Well, I'm a fatalist: you can't escape what's coming to you—so there you are! You must make the best of it. No fox can escape for long, if the pack is out after him.'

"'I recollect that very well, for at the moment this remark—so ordinary, and of a kind to which we have all had to listen against our wills so often—irritated me almost beyond endurance. It accorded so ill, I thought, with that curious beauty, with that face which seemed waiting for one of the great emotions—and it was *fear*, I felt sure. But in that way, people so often disappoint one by enunciating sentiments which do not suit them . . . Then she went on to talk of bazaars in the home counties, and gave way to little bursts of self-importance, equally inappropriate.

"And yet were they, I wondered in reality bursts of self-importance? She brought them into the conversation, I felt, not so much to impress a stranger as to comfort herself, and she clung

hard to them because she was desperately anxious to impress upon herself that life was really of this pattern for her, and that some dim, huge existence of antique catastrophe, to which she belonged, and from which she had once fled, possessed no actuality. So I felt, might one of the Atridae, Clytemnestra or Elektra, in the intervals of those catastrophic events to which their names are, for us, indissolubly attached, have told acquaintances of the Sale of Work she was getting up in order to aid the honest poor of Mycenae.

" Rougher and rougher it grew; and I did not see them again that day. Certainly it had grown too stormy now for one to take any sort of pleasure in the voyage. It was not even possible to sleep: though storms, as a rule, make me feel sleepy: and at night, if for a single moment you dozed off, you were sure to be woken at once by the flying open, flapping and slamming of cupboard doors, or by the sensation that the soul itself, the *psyche* round which the body is built up, had slightly shifted its habitation.

" 'Why,' all the passengers, as so often during a voyage, were asking themselves: '*why* did I do it?' . . . But my own chief emotion, and one that I nearly always experience on the Atlantic, though it has been my lot to travel a good deal upon it, was of fright: I did not feel sick, I felt frightened of those cold valleys beneath, endless and undulating, as deep, we are told, as the island mountains are high . . . Incidentally (forgive me for interrupting my own story), hasn't it grown much rougher since we began talking, or is it my imagination?"

I had to admit that the weather had changed. The boat had begun to pitch about in an unexpected way.

" I thought so," he said, and paused a moment. " Still, it will at least be smooth in the Canal . . . But let me proceed," he continued. " Fortunately I was leaving the boat at Madeira, and that was only two days ahead. But how sincerely during those hours I longed for it, that nest of purple bougainvillea and peroxide blondes, poised in mid-ocean under its cosy of Atlantic cloud.

" The next day was of too unpleasant a character for one to be able to take an interest in anything, in food or drink or sleep or passengers: but I noticed, all the same, that Mr. Ruevinny was alone at luncheon. The following morning the storm appeared to have abated a little, though not much, and, while walking up and down the deck, I met him.

" ' Good morning!' I cried, with false sea-heartiness. ' And how are *you* this morning? I'm sorry to see you're alone.'

" ' Yes, it's a nuisance,' he replied. ' I had so much hoped it would be fine . . . After all, we're getting near Madeira now, and it ought *not* to be like this. I tell you, it worries me . . . You see, it isn't so much that my wife's a bad sailor—she doesn't really feel

ill now; the truth is, she's frightened in a ship!'

"'That's nothing to be ashamed of,' I said. 'I am, too. I believe a good many people are, if only they'd allow themselves to admit it.'

"'I dare say . . . But, you see, it's different for her: the last time she was on a proper voyage was in the *Titanic*: her twin brother went down with it, and she was only rescued herself by a miracle. Why, for years she wouldn't go abroad at all, even refused to take on the hour's journey across the Channel; though, before that, she used to love Paris . . . And I'll tell you a peculiar thing; the sea can be as smooth as anything, and the moment she sets her foot on board, sure enough, it begins to get stormy: I've seen it happen in the Channel, scores of times, so that often I wished I hadn't persuaded her to change her mind and come with me, even for that short distance.

"'I ought never to have let her come on this journey: never: I ought to have forbidden it absolutely, from the start . . . But she had been worrying about me—I'd been ill a long time, and those damned medicos said a long sea voyage was the only thing to put me right—and she insisted. It seemed as though she *must* come, although she dreaded it, if you can get my meaning.'

"So that was it! . . . no wonder she was frightened, even at the surface level. I thought of the magnificent ship on her maiden voyage, of the two bands playing, and of that sudden ice-cold crash, and silence, as the breath of destruction reached it; and then of the watery confusion, of the strange, voiceless last meetings in green, deep alleys between the waves, where those who could swim bobbed up and down; or were knocked together like corks, but, their voices being lost already beneath the sound of the ocean, could not communicate in any way, and thus, it must have seemed, had become hostile to each other . . . So that was it! That was the meaning in those wide-open eyes, like the eyes of a statue in bright sunlight: that was the meaning, perhaps sub-conscious, under her casual, silly yet intent words, 'No fox can escape for long, if the pack is out after him' . . . No, nor a human being, if the whole pack of furies attend his coming and his going.

"That afternoon we arrived at Madeira, and I said goodbye. The Ruevinnys—beset though they were on deck by the islanders, who were trying to sell them embroideries, flowers, sandals, boxes of palm-wood, models of bullock-carts, native dresses and budge-rigars—waved to me as I left for the shore in a motor-boat: and I noticed, again, the singular lack of expression in her face, which yet showed, when once you comprehended, so much more terror than terror itself. She gave a look, too, I thought, of longing towards the land: but I was too far away to see clearly. At any

rate, they should be all right now. The rest of the journey, especially at this time of year, should be one of tropical calm, of deep, blue phosphorescent gardens beneath the waters, and of flying-fishes leaping over them as birds skim a lawn.

" It was not until a fortnight later, not until a fortnight after it had happened, that I saw the newspaper: '*Hurricane in South Atlantic Seas. Coastline Towns Swept by Tidal Wave*,' I read: '*British Liner Sinks Off Rio. All Lives Lost.*'

" I thought at once of Mrs. Ruevinny . . . So it was over now. She belonged in some way to the sea, and it must reclaim her: she had always known that, I reflected; even though she could not always rationally believe it. At any rate, it was over, whatever it might mean: the end of some long pursuit, of which one could not tell the beginning: or, perhaps—who knows?—it was only the middle act of a drama laid over several centuries, or epochs.

" I wondered how that lovely face had looked at the end, and, knowing what was in store for her, how much more matter-of-fact she had contrived to make her voice, when she talked to her husband for the last time . . . And yet, as so often happens, actuality and its foretelling had been a little at odds . . . I turned over to the stop-press news. '*Survivor Rescued*,' I read. '*Strange Coincidence* . . . Mrs. Ruevinny, who was rescued yesterday afternoon in a state of exhaustion, proves to be one of the survivors of the *Titanic*: her twin brother perished with that ship. It is feared that Mr. Ruevinny, and all the other passengers and hands are lost.'

" So it had not got her after all: the fox was free once more. The last act, poor woman, had not been played.

". . . I suppose you'd call it superstitious of me to feel like that? But life sometimes seems easier to understand, if one is superstitious . . . Well, that was thirteen years ago. And, touching wood, she's on this ship, bound for Ceylon to see her son. (I spoke to her this morning: doesn't look a day older.) But what ought one to do, act on superstitious belief or defy it? . . . Somehow, I lack the courage to do anything so silly as leave the boat at Suez."

He stopped talking, and became silent, pondering—while I, though obliged to hold on to every object I saw in order to preserve my balance, managed to get downstairs to send a cable.

* * *

Doing good is no fun unless you are caught in the act.

H.A.

A BRACELET FOR KARMESIN

"I am, you understand, a man of genius," he said

by GERALD KERSH

"JEWELS? Haha!" said Karmesin, pushing his nose against the jeweller's window. "I know all about jewels. Look there. What for a diamond is that? Three hundred and twenty-five pounds for that yellow rubbish? Hoo! It is worth exactly one hundred and seventy-five. Only, people like big stones. Women, particularly. They would rather have a miserable discoloured diamond as big as a hazel-nut, than a small, perfect, white stone. I like diamonds. I have collected them."

"What, bought them?" I asked.

"Only a fool buys diamonds," said Karmesin, eyeing an emerald as a hungry boy looks at a pie. "The proper thing to do is, steal them. As a jewel thief, I was probably the greatest of all time. Listen. Did you ever hear of the Betzendorfer affair? A diamond bracelet worth twenty thousand pounds, and an emerald valued at five thousand, were spirited away."

"I seem to have read something about it, somewhere," I said.

"I did the spiriting," said Karmesin.

"It is one of those unsolved mysteries, isn't it?" I asked.

"*Ptah!*" said Karmesin. "There is no such thing as an unsolved mystery. Always, there is somebody, somewhere, who has a solution. What the police cannot put their great red hands on is an unsolved mystery, eh? *Pfui* and *pfui*, fifty thousand times *pfui* on such claptrap! Most people are dumb-heads, my young fran."

"Come away from this window," I said.

"Bah. What is there in that window? Rubbish. Chicken food. Twenty thousand pounds would buy the whole shop. Am I to be interested in such small change? All right, let us walk on. Have you the price of a cup of tea?"

"I have threepence."

"I have threepence also."

We sat in a teashop. "Tea!" said Karmesin to the waitress, with the air of a man calling for a dozen of Pol Roger.

"You were talking about a bracelet."

"The Betzendorfer affair? Aha. Listen . . ."

It happened in Vienna (said Karmesin) a number of years ago. I was living there. Vienna is a nice city. It was full of money. I was prosperous. Women turned to look at me in the street. Men gnashed their teeth when they saw me. What a figure of a man I was! A joy! A dream!

But I will not weary you with all this. One day I was out walking, when I saw something which made me stop. It looked like a little firmament of stars, collected by a god, and imprisoned in a barred window. It was the diamond bracelet. Ai, my young friend, what a diamond bracelet! Who could believe that crystallized carbon could contain so much pure light! They sparkled, they flashed, they drew me as a magnet draws a pin. I stared at them. They stared back at me. They twinkled and winked, as if they were trying to say :—" Come and get me."

The bracelet was not priced, needless to say. One does not stick a ticket on the moon. But I calculated that it would be a good twenty thousand pounds worth of anybody's money. It came into my mind that Fate had sent me to Vienna simply to get that bracelet. I determined in that moment to steal it.

I went away and thought.

When I think, something happens. I mean to say, I do not think in vain. I am, you understand, a man of genius.

In these days, Vienna was the home of psychiatry. Every lunatic in the world went to Vienna, either to start a new science, or to be cured of a non-existent state of mind. Psychiatry was the new fad. I do not deny that some people are psychiatric cases. Indeed, most people are. But not the ones who rush to psychiatrists to be cured. They need only to be cured of their desire to be cured. There was Freud, of course. That man of genius was the master of them all. He did not toy with society cranks. No. He simply worked. But Freud was Freud; a giant. Next to him, the most fashionable psychiatrist was a certain Professor Trotz.

Trotz was a clever fellow. He was, I believe, a good psychiatrist. But he also liked luxury and money, and played the prevalent crazes for all they were worth. Society women flocked to his sanatorium, from every part of Europe and America. He had a huge house, full of impressive attendants.

As soon as I thought of him, I knew that the diamonds were mine. You see, he was well-known, but not much photographed. Sometimes a picture of him would appear in a society magazine: he was a very big, impressive man, with a moustache like that of the philosopher Nietzsche.

It was very nice.

I went to see him one morning, presenting the card of one of the noblest French families. "I am the Duc de Bourgogne," I said.

He purred like a pussy-cat, for the Duc de Bourgogne was one of the wealthiest men in Europe.

"I wish to consult you," I said. "But this is a matter of the utmost delicacy. It concerns my unhappy brother."

"Yes?"

"In every way but one, my brother is sound," I said, "but he has one peculiar aberration."

"And what is that, Monsieur le Duc?"

"He has some fixation which distresses us very greatly."

"Tut tut."

"Any mention of jewels drives him mad."

"But exactly how, Monsieur le Duc?"

"If, for example, you showed him a diamond bracelet, he would become violent."

"But how interesting."

"Indeed, the very mention of the word 'jewel' drives him into a meaningless frenzy. At first, we thought that it would pass. But instead, it grows worse," I said. "Sometimes, he raves and shouts simply at the thought of jewels. It is very disconcerting."

"You have my sincerest sympathy," said Trotz.

"If you can cure him," I said, "you may name your own fee. I would pay anything in the world, to cure my dear brother."

"I shall be happy to help."

"But," I said, "you understand; he must not know that he is being brought to a psychiatric sanatorium."

"Certainly not."

"What I propose to do is, to bring him here on some pretext, and leave him with you."

"A good idea. When did you propose to bring your brother?"

"Tomorrow," I said.

"Good. And at what time?"

"Shall we say four?"

"Perfect." He made a note.

"Now," I said, "I wish you to accept at least part of your fee in advance."

"No, no."

"But yes."

"I couldn't think of it."

"But I insist, Professor!"

"Ah, well, if you *insist*, Monsieur le Duc. . . ."

From a wallet as fat as a pig, I took ten thousand schillings, and flicked them down.

"A receipt?" he said, taking up a pen.

"Pooh!" I replied. "And now be so good as to inform your servants that when I arrive tomorrow at four, they must show me to your waiting room without inquiry or hesitation."

"But certainly, most certainly, with the very greatest pleasure in the world, my honoured Monsieur le Duc!"

Bon. It was all running as smoothly as oiled steel.

The next day I visited the jeweller. I asked for the proprietor of the shop, and presented a card. What card? Why, the card of Professor Trotz, of the Trotz Sanatorium!

"I am Professor Trotz," I said.

"Ah yes," said the jeweller.

"I am about to become engaged."

"A thousand congratulations!"

"But it it not yet officially announced. I wish to purchase a present for my *fiancée*."

Ah, how that jeweller smiled. "But of course!"

"Something really fine. That bracelet, for instance. . . ."

He showed it to me. Ah, what a bracelet that was! It took me all my self-control to prevent myself from trembling. Its price was colossal. No matter. Nothing could be too good for my *fiancée*; for the bride of the rich Professor Trotz; for the stupendously wealthy Madame Vanderkook, the widow of the fabulously wealthy Mynheer Vanderkook who owned most of the Dutch East Indies. . . .

"Naturally," said the jeweller, "one cannot give a small present to a lady like that; oh no."

"She is at present indisposed," I said.

"Ah?"

"She is in fact a patient at my sanatorium."

"Ah . . ." The damned jeweller had the insolence to wink at me. The psychiatrist had caught a wealthy client, he thought. I gave him a terrible look.

"I should want you, therefore," I said, "to come and show the bracelet to the lady herself, at the Trotz Sanatorium. You may come with me. Let her choose for herself. I shall also want an engagement ring, an emerald, not too dear. Something about five thousand pounds, six . . ."

Ha. It was as good as done.

He put the bracelet and the ring into a leather case which he chained to his wrist, and showed me an automatic pistol in a holster under his jacket. "We must take no chances," he said.

"No," I said, "there are so many thieves about."

"Exactly, Professor Trotz."

We took a taxi and arrived at the Sanatorium at four o'clock. The doorman let me in, touching his hat. The butler bowed. The nurses prostrated themselves to the ground. The burly attendants practically kissed my feet. There could have been no doubt in the mind of the jeweller that I was the Professor, the owner of the sanatorium.

I took him into the Professor's ante-room, and said:

"Now, if you will please let me take the bracelet and the ring in to my *fiancée*, and wait here, I shall be with you in one minute."

"Pleasure, Herr Professor Trotz, infinite pleasure!"

He unbuckled the bag and gave me the jewels. I walked casually into the Professor's room, and whispered:

"Sssh! Not a word. He's waiting out there. Let me out at the other door. I can't bear to be here when he finds out . . ."

"I understand," said the Professor.

He let me out at the opposite door, and away I went, with the beautiful bracelet in my pocket.

Karmesin laughed until tea got into his bronchial tubes; after which he coughed, and beat the table with his huge fists until I slapped his back. Then, subsiding, he said:

"It was a joke. It was a scream. The Professor went out. The jeweller said: 'Are the jewels satisfactory?' 'There, there,' said the Professor. 'But my diamonds?' 'Hush, hush, and let us talk it over.' 'My diamond bracelet! My emerald!' screamed the jeweller, and pulled out his pistol. Trotz disarmed him with a kick on the wrist, and called for the attendants, who, in ten seconds, had the unhappy man strapped in a strait-waistcoat.

"Twelve hours passed before anybody realized that he was not a Duke's brother, but a swindled jeweller. And then it was much too late. I was on my way to Warsaw, disguised as an Indian Maharajah. It was good fun. It was a lovely bracelet. The emerald, also, was magnificent. I like emeralds. They bring me luck. They were *jewels*, I tell you. But now, what do you get? Rubbish, nonsense, glass, valueless dirt! I would not take such diamonds as we were looking at, for a gift. No, not if you paid me, I wouldn't take them. Have you the price of five cigarettes? No? Bah. Let us walk . . ."

* * *

DEFINITION

ECONOMY. Purchasing the whisky you do not need for the price of the cow that you cannot afford.

AMBROSE BIERCE, *The Devil's Dictionary*

Country Musick

HARK, now, what plaining ravish'd fowl
So screeches forth? O, 'tis the owl,
And whining o'er th'echoing lane
Resounds the scream of aeroplane.
To-whit,to-who,to-zoom,to-wheeew,woomp-wonk!

Hark, hark, to what a piercing note
Rude robin-redbreast tunes his throat!
How shrilly shrieks the Great Grey Shrike,
The Green-Line Bus, the motor-bike!
Iug-jug,dug-dug,whiz-whiz,crash-gears,konk-honk!

Brave racket! 'Tis th'enchainéd hound
This time that rends the sky with sound
And blendeth with the tractor's din
And yokel yodelling at inn.
Bow-wow,ding-dong,pop-pop,happy-birthday-tereu!

Then hasten still to quiet country fields
Where solitude each separate musick yields.
Heigh-ho,chuk-chuk,back-fire,hey-nonny,
loud-explosion,cock-a-diddle-dow,wallop,
bash-kerump,all-hell-let-loose,cuccu!

JUSTIN RICHARDSON

★*John de Mandeville knew what he was doing when he sat down to write a book of travels—says Malcolm Letts in his book "Sir John Mandeville"—for in the fourteenth century, travellers' tales were the talk of the day. Marvels and miracles, and the fantastic wonders of far off lands were solemnly presented — and accepted — as the sober truth. The famous Letter of Prester John, with its account of the fabulous land of Ind — or Ethiopia — provided unlimited tales for the honest traveller and stay-at-home scribe alike.*

And Mandeville himself, in his amusing hotch-potch of monsters, witches and fantastic sprites no doubt helped himself freely.

"Happy Land" — Mandeville's description of the land of Prester John — is an extract from Mr. Letts' entertaining study of this indefatigable — and without doubt entirely bogus — traveller.

HAPPY LAND

by MALCOLM LETTS

SIR JOHN MANDEVILLE describes the country of Prester John, which we are told was an island, but there was nothing strange in this, as Mandeville speaks of India, Cathay and Tibet as islands. Mandeville did not think as much of Prester John as he did of the Great Chan, but he adds a personal statement that he and his fellows saw all these wonders, having dwelt at Prester John's court for a long time, and it was Mandeville who first introduced the famous Letter of Prester John to English readers.

It is difficult for us to realize today the spell which this legendary Christian priest-king cast over men's minds in the Middle Ages . . .

As time went on and no genuine traveller was able to meet with Prester John in Asia, the Asiatic legend faded away, and Prester John was transferred with all his marvels to Ethiopia, where the Portuguese tried, not very successfully, to locate him. This transfer gave rise to a number of interesting speculations, among others, whether Prester John was black or white, or merely a mulatto of mongrel complexion . . . but Mandeville was content to look for Prester John in Asia, and it is to Prester John's Asiatic kingdom that we must now direct our steps.

The only approach to Prester John's country was by sea, and the voyage was likely to be perilous, for the seas thereabouts were infested with loadstones or magnetic rocks, which lured ships to destruction by drawing out their nails, drowned the sailors and left the hulks to rot. For this reason wise mariners in those parts used stitched ships without a scrap of iron in them and so escaped destruction. Mandeville does not tell us that he sailed the Magnetic Sea, but he claims to have seen the wrecks afar off, the masts and sail-yards looking like a great island of trees and brushwood, " full of thorns and briars, great plenty," as it were a great wood or grove—an unforgettable picture . . .

Prester John was of course a Christian. He had seventy-two provinces under him, and in every province was a King. And these kings had kings under them, and all were tributaries of Prester John. The Letter states that there were no poor in that land, and that thieves and liars dared not raise their heads. There was no crime, flattery or strife, but abundance of riches for all. Mandeville compresses these happy virtues into one brief sentence : " and they set not by no barretts ne by cautels, nor of no deceits."

Then comes the description of the famous Gravelly Sea, which had its origin, no doubt, in the shifting sands of the desert. The sea was all gravel and sand, without water, and the sand moved and swelled like the sea and was never still. It was impossible to cross it, and no man knew what lay beyond.

But, although there was no water, " yet men find therein and on the banks full good fish of other manner of kind and shape than men find in any other sea, and they be of right good taste and delicious to man's meat."

In Prester John's country was also another marvellous sea which flowed from Paradise, carrying precious stones, wood and sand to the Gravelly Sea, where it disappeared. On three days a week it flowed and no man could cross it, but on the other days it could be crossed . . .

We have next a description of the ephemeral trees which go back to the Alexander romances. " And in that plain, every day at sun-rising, begin to grow small trees, and they grow till mid-day, bearing fruit, but no man dare take of that fruit, for it is a thing of faerie. And after mid-day they decrease and enter again into the earth, so that at the going down of the sun they appear no more. And so they do every day."

Next comes a description of Prester John's state when he went to war and when he rode privily. When he went to war he had carried before him three crosses of gold full of precious stones, each cross being carried in a chariot. The crosses were guarded by

10,000 men at arms and more than 100,000 foot soldiers, not counting the main host and wings, as ordained for battle. In peace-time the emperor had borne before him a plain cross of wood, in remembrance that Christ died upon a tree, together with a golden platter filled with earth, in token that Prester John's nobility and might, like his body, would turn to dust, but he had also borne before him a silver vessel full of precious stones to signify his lordship and might.

Prester John dwelt chiefly in his city of Susa. Here his palace was so noble and rich that no man could believe what was told of it unless he had seen it. Each tower of the palace was adorned with gold, and in each tower were two carbuncles, so disposed that they gave light at night.

The gates were of sardonyx, and the borders and bars were of ivory. The windows were of crystal, and the tables were made of emeralds, amethysts and gold, covered with precious stones. The steps to the throne and the pillars of the hall were constructed of jewels, gold and orient pearls.

There were no lamps in the palace, only carbuncles, to give light at night, while a brazier full of balm gave forth a sweet savour, and voided away all wicked airs and corruptions. Prester John's bed was made of sapphires, blended with gold, to induce sleep and to keep him from lechery: "for he will not lie with his wives, but four sithes in the year, after the four seasons, and that is only for to engender children."

He was served by seven kings, seventy-two dukes and three hundred and sixty earls. Twelve archbishops and twenty bishops sat at his table, and the Patriarch of St. Thomas was his pope. Each of these great lords had his special duties. One was master of the household, another was his chamberlain, another held the dishes, another the cup; one was his steward, another his marshal and prince of arms.

"And his land dureth in very breadth four months' journeys, and in length out of measure, that is to say, all the isles under earth that we suppose to be under us."

The emperor was called Prester John because of his great humility. Once upon a time there was a mighty prince, a paynim, who had Christian knights in his train. During his travels with one of his knights he reached Egypt where, in church on the Saturday in Whitsun-week, a bishop was busy with ordinations. The prince asked what kind of men they were who were before the bishop, and the knight answered that they were being ordained priests. Thereupon the prince said that he would no more be called emperor but priest, and that he would take the name of the first priest who left the church.

His name was John, and thereafter the rulers of that country were always called Prester John . . .

The story of this, the mightiest and saintliest of earthly rulers, with his pomp and humility, his hosts of retainers, his happy subjects and his busy cities, must have brought life and colour to many a dingy city of the west and given fresh courage and hope to hundreds in a world which was noisy with war and rumours of war.

Somewhere at the world's end, was this happy land, where Christians, Jews, Amazons, and Brahmins could all live together in contentment and peace, where men had work and food and abundant leisure, and where none was downtrodden or oppressed. Here, at last, was the promise of that Earthly Paradise which hung over men's minds like a dream.

Even if Mandeville failed to reach it, he could paint a picture which must have gripped the imagination of every reader.

* * *

ANSWERS to PENNY PLAIN on page 12

1. *Jane Napier, in "Jane," by W. Somerset Maugham.*
2. *The baby, in "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland," by Lewis Carroll.*
3. *The woman whom nobody loves, who walks through the fields in gloves, in Frances Cornford's poem, "To a Fat Lady Seen from the Train."*
4. *Dr. Johnson, in Boswell's "Life of Johnson."*
5. *The Dark Lady, in Shakespeare's sonnet, "My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun."*
6. *Prudence Sarn, in "Precious Bane," by Mary Webb.*
7. *Mr. Polly, in "The History of Mr. Polly," by H. G. Wells.*
8. *Leah, Rachel's sister and married to Jacob, in the Old Testament Book of Genesis.*
9. *The Miller, in the prologue to Geoffrey Chaucer's "The Canterbury Tales."*

MINUKE

Perfectly harmless, you'd have said

by NIGEL KNEALE

THE estate agent kept an uncomfortable silence until we reached his car. "Frankly, I wish you hadn't got wind of that," he said. "Don't know how you did; I thought I had the whole thing carefully disposed of. Oh, please get in."

He pulled his door shut and frowned. "It puts me in a rather awkward spot. I suppose I'd better tell you all I know about that case, or you'd be suspecting me of heaven-knows-what kinds of chicanery in your own."

As we set off to see the property I was interested in, he shifted the cigarette to the side of his mouth.

"It's quite a distance, so I can tell you on the way there," he said. "We'll pass the very spot, as a matter of fact, and you can see it for yourself. Such as there is to see."

It was away back before the war (said the estate agent). At the height of the building boom. You remember how it was: ribbon development in full blast everywhere; speculative builders sticking things up almost overnight. Though at least you could get a house when you wanted it in those days.

I've always been careful in what I handle—I want you to understand that. Then one day I was handed a packet of coast-road bungalows, for letting. Put up by one of these gone tomorrow firms, and bought by a local man. I can't say I exactly jumped for joy, but for once the things looked all right, and — business is inclined to be business.

The desirable residence you heard about stood at the end of the row. Actually, it seemed to have the best site. On a sort of natural platform, as it were, raised above road level and looking straight out over the sea.

Like all the rest, it had a simple two-bedroom, lounge, living-room, kitchen, bathroom layout. Red-tiled roof, roughcast walls. Ornamental portico, garden strip all round. Sufficiently far from town, but with all conveniences.

It was taken by a man named Pritchard. Cinema projectionist, I think he was. Wife, a boy of ten or so, and a rather younger

daughter. Oh—and dog, one of those black, lop-eared animals. They christened the place "Minuke," M-I-N-U-K-E. My Nook. Yes, that's what I said too. And not even the miserable excuse of its being phonetically correct. Still, hardly worse than most.

Well, at the start everything seemed quite jolly. The Pritchards settled in and busied themselves with rearing a privet hedge and shoving flowers in. They'd paid the first quarter in advance, and as far as I was concerned, were out of the picture for a bit.

Then, about a fortnight after they'd moved in, I had a telephone call from Mrs. P. to say there was something odd about the kitchen tap. Apparently the thing had happened twice. The first time was when her sister was visiting them, and tried to fill the kettle: no water would come through for a long time, then suddenly squirted violently and almost soaked the woman. I gather the Pritchards hadn't really believed this—thought she was trying to find fault with their little nest—it had never happened before, and she couldn't make it happen again.

Then, about a week later, it did: with Mrs. Pritchard this time. After her husband had examined the tap and could find nothing wrong with it, he decided the water supply must be faulty. So they got on to me.

I went round personally, as it was the first complaint from any of these bungalows. The tap seemed normal and I remember asking if the schoolboy son could have been experimenting with their main stop, when Mrs. Pritchard, who had been fiddling with the tap, suddenly said, "Quick, look at this! It's off now!" They were quite cocky about its happening when I was there.

It really was odd. I turned the tap to the limit, but—not a drop! Not even the sort of gasping gurgle you hear when the supply is turned off at the main. After a couple of minutes, though, it came on. Water shot out with, I should say, about ten times normal force, as if it had been held under pressure. Then gradually it died down and ran steadily.

Both children were in the room with us until we all dodged out of the door to escape a soaking—it had splashed all over the ceiling—so they couldn't have been up to any tricks. I promised the Pritchards to have the pipes checked. Before returning to town, I called at the next two bungalows in the row: neither of the tenants had had any trouble at all with the water. I thought, well, that localised it at least.

When I reached my office there was a telephone message waiting, from Pritchard. I rang him back and he was obviously annoyed. "Look here," he said, "not ten minutes after you left, we've had something else happen! The wall of the large bedroom's cracked from top to bottom. Big pieces of plaster fell, and the bed's in a

terrible mess." And then he said, " You wouldn't have got me in a jerry-built place like this if I'd known ! "

I had plasterers on the job next morning, and the whole water supply to " Minuke " under examination. For about three days there was peace. The tap behaved itself, and absolutely nothing was found to be wrong. I was annoyed at what seemed to have been unnecessary expenditure. It looked as if the Pritchards were going to be difficult—and I've had my share of that type : fault-finding cranks occasionally carry eccentricity to the extent of a little private destruction, to prove their points. I was on the watch from now on.

Then it came again.

Pritchard rang me at my home, before nine in the morning. His voice sounded a bit off. Shaky.

" For God's sake can you come round here right away," he said. " Tell you about it when you get here." And then he said, almost fiercely, but quietly and close to the mouthpiece, " There's something damned queer about this place ! " Dramatising is a typical feature of all cranks, I thought, but particularly the little mousy kind, like Pritchard.

I went to " Minuke " and found that Mrs. Pritchard was in bed, in a state of collapse. The doctor had given her a sleeping dose.

Pritchard told me a tale that was chiefly remarkable for the expression on his face as he told it.

I don't know if you're familiar with the layout of that type of bungalow ? The living-room is in the front of the house, with the kitchen behind it. To get from one to the other you have to use the little hallway, through two doors. But for convenience at meal-times, there's a serving-hatch in the wall between these rooms. A small wooden door slides up and down over the hatch-opening.

" The wife was just passing a big plate of bacon and eggs through from the kitchen," Pritchard told me, " when the hatch door came down on her wrists. I saw it and I heard her yell. I thought the cord must've snapped, so I said, ' All right, all right ! ' and went to pull it up because it's only a light wooden frame."

Pritchard was a funny colour, and as far as I could judge, it was genuine.

" Do you know, it wouldn't come ! I got my fingers under it and heaved, but it might have weighed two hundredweight. Once it gave an inch or so, and then pressed harder. That was it—it was *pressing* down ! I heard the wife groan. I said, ' Hold on ! ' and nipped round through the hall. When I got into the kitchen she was on the floor, fainted.

" And the hatch-door was hitched up as right as ninepence. That gave me a turn ! " He sat down, quite deflated : it didn't appear

to be put on. Still, ordinary neurotics can be almost as troublesome as out-and-out cranks.

I tested the hatch, gingerly; and, of course, the cords were sound and it ran easily.

"Possibly a bit stiff at times, being new," I said. "They're apt to jam if you're rough with them." And then, "By the way, just what were you hinting on the phone?"

He looked at me. It was warm sunlight outside, with a bus passing. Normal enough to take the mike out of Frankenstein's monster. "Never mind," he said, and gave a sheepish half-grin. "Bit of—well, funny construction in this house, though, eh?"

I'm afraid I was rather outspoken with him.

Let alone any twaddle about a month-old bungalow being haunted, I was determined to clamp down on this "jerry-building" talk. Perhaps I was beginning to have doubts myself.

I wrote straight off to the building company when I'd managed to trace them, busy developing an arterial road about three counties away. I dare say my letter was on the insinuating side: I think I asked if they had any record of difficulties in the construction of this bungalow.

At any rate I got a sniffy reply by return, stating that the matter was out of their hands: in addition, their records were not available for discussion.

Blind alley.

In the meantime, things at "Minuke" had worsened to a really frightening degree. I dreaded the phone ringing. One morning the two Pritchards senior awoke to find that nearly all the furniture in their bedroom had been moved about, including the bed they had been sleeping in: they had felt absolutely nothing. Food became suddenly and revoltingly decomposed. All the chimney pots had come down, not just into the garden, but to the far side of the high road, except one which appeared, pulverised, on the living-room floor.

The obvious attempts of the Pritchards to keep a rational outlook had put paid to most of my suspicions by this time.

I managed to locate a local man who had been employed during the erection of the bungalows, as an extra hand. He had worked only on the foundations of "Minuke," but what he had to say was interesting.

They had found the going slow because of striking a layer of enormous flat stones, apparently trimmed slate, but as the site was otherwise excellent, they pressed on, using the stone as foundation where it fitted in with the plan, and laying down rubble where it didn't.

The concrete skin over the rubble—my ears burned when I

heard about that, I can tell you—this wretched so-called concrete had cracked, or shattered, several times. Which wasn't entirely surprising, if it had been laid as he described. The flat stones, he said, had not been seriously disturbed. A workmate had referred to them as " a giant's grave," so it was possibly an old burial mound. Norse, perhaps—those are fairly common along this coast—or even very much older.

Apart from this—I'm no diehard sceptic, I may as well confess—I was beginning to admit modest theories about a poltergeist, in spite of a lack of corroborative knockings and ornament-throwing. There were two young children in the house, and the lore has it that kids are often unconsciously connected with phenomena of that sort, though usually adolescents. Still, in the real-estate profession you have to be careful, and if I could see the Pritchards safely off the premises without airing these possibilities, it might be kindest to the bungalow's future.

I went to " Minuke " the same afternoon.

It was certainly turning out an odd nook. I found a departing policeman on the doorstep. That morning the back door had been burst in by a hundredweight or so of soil, and Mrs. Pritchard was trying to convince herself that a practical joker had it in for them. The policeman had taken some notes, and was giving vague advice about " civil action " which showed that he was out of his depth.

Pritchard looked very tired, almost ill. " I've got leave from my job, to look after them," he said, when we were alone. I thought he was wise. He had given his wife's illness as the reason, and I was glad of that.

" I don't believe in—unnatural happenings," he said.

I agreed with him, non-committally.

" But I'm afraid of what ideas the kids might get. They're both at impressionable ages, y'know."

I recognised the symptoms without disappointment. " You mean, you'd rather move elsewhere," I said.

He nodded. " I like the district, mind you. But what I—"

There was a report like a gun in the very room.

I found myself with both arms up to cover my face. There were tiny splinters everywhere, and a dust of fibre in the air. The door had exploded. Literally.

To hark back to constructional details, it was one of those light, hollow frame-and-plywood jobs. As you'll know, it takes considerable force to splinter plywood: well, this was in tiny fragments. And the oddest thing was that we had felt no blast effect.

In the next room I heard their dog howling. Pritchard was as stiff as a poker.

"I felt it!" he said. "I felt this lot coming. I've got to knowing when something's likely to happen. It's all round!" Of course I began to imagine I'd sensed something too, but I doubt if I had really; my shock came with the crash. Mrs. Pritchard was in the doorway by this time with the kids behind her. He motioned them out and grabbed my arm.

"The thing is," he whispered, "that I can still feel it! Stronger than ever, by God! Look, will you stay at home tonight, in case I need—well, in case things get worse? I can phone you."

On my way back I called at the town library and managed to get hold of a volume on supernatural possession and what-not. Yes, I was committed now. But the library didn't specialise in that line, and when I opened the book at home, I found it was very little help. "Vampires of south-eastern Europe" type of stuff. I came across references to something the jargon called an "elemental" which I took to be a good deal more vicious and destructive than any poltergeist. A thoroughly nasty form of manifestation, if it existed. Those Norse gravestones were fitting into the picture uncomfortably well; it was fashionable in those days to be buried with all the trimmings, human sacrifice and even more unmentionable attractions.

But I read on. After half a chapter on zombies and Rumanian werewolves, the whole thing began to seem so fantastic that I turned seriously to working out methods of exploding somebody's door as a practical joke. Even a totally certifiable joker would be likelier than vampires. In no time I'd settled down with a whisky, doodling wiring diagrams, and only occasionally—like twinges of conscience—speculating on contacting the psychic investigation people.

When the phone rang I was hardly prepared for it.

It was a confused, distant voice, gabbling desperately, but I recognised it as Pritchard. "For God's sake, don't lose a second! Get here—it's all hell on earth! Can't you hear it? My God, I'm going crazy!" And in the background I thought I was able to hear something. A sort of bubbling, shushing "wah-wah" noise. Indescribable. But you hear some odd sounds on telephones at any time.

"Yes," I said, "I'll come immediately. Why don't you all leave—" But the line had gone dead.

Probably I'd never moved faster. I scrambled out to the car with untied shoes flopping, though I remembered to grab a heavy stick in the hall—whatever use it was to be. I drove like fury, heart belting, straight to "Minuke," expecting to see heaven knows what.

But everything looked still and normal there. The moon was up and I could see the whole place clearly. Curtained lights in the windows. Not a sound.

I rang. After a moment Pritchard opened the door. He was quiet and seemed almost surprised to see me.

I pushed inside. "Well?" I said. "What's happened?"

"Not a thing, so far," he said. "That's why I didn't expect—"

I felt suddenly angry. "Look here," I said, "what are you playing at? Seems to me that any hoaxing round here begins a lot nearer home than you'd have me believe!" Then the penny dropped. I saw by the fright in his face that he knew something had gone wrong. That was the most horrible, sickening moment of the whole affair for me.

"Didn't you ring?" I said.

And he shook his head.

I've been in some tight spots. But there was always some concrete, actual business in hand to screw the mind safely down to. I suppose panic is when the sub-conscious breaks loose and everything in your head dashes screaming out. It was only just in time that I found a touch of the concrete and actual. A kiddie's paintbox on the floor, very watery.

"The children," I said. "Where are they?"

"Wife's just putting the little 'un to bed. She's been restless tonight: just wouldn't go, crying and difficult. Arthur's in the bathroom. Look here, what's happened?"

I told him, making it as short and matter of fact as I could. He turned ghastly.

"Better get them dressed and out of here right away," I said. "Make some excuse, not to alarm them."

He'd gone before I finished speaking.

I smoked hard, trying to build up the idea of "Hoax! Hoax!" in my mind. After all, it could have been. But I knew it wasn't.

Everything looked cosy and normal. Clock ticking. Fire red and mellow. Half-empty cocoa mug on the table. The sound of the sea from beyond the road.

I went through to the kitchen. The dog was there, looking up from its sleeping-basket under the sink. "Good dog," I said, and it wriggled its tail.

Pritchard came in from the hall. He jumped when he saw me.

"Getting nervy!" he said. "They won't be long. I don't know where we can go if we—well, if we have to—to leave tonight—"

"My car's outside," I told him. "I'll fix you up. Look here, did you ever 'hear things'? Odd noises?" I hadn't told him that part of the telephone call.

He looked at me so oddly I thought he was going to collapse.

"I don't know," he said. "Can you? At this moment?"

I listened.

"No," I said. "The clock on the shelf. The sea. Nothing else. No."

"The sea," he said, barely whispering. "But you can't hear the sea in this kitchen!"

He was close to me in an instant. Absolutely terrified. "Yes, I have heard this before! I think we all have. I said it was the sea: so as not to frighten them. But it isn't! And I recognised it when I came in here just now. That's what made me start. It's getting louder: it does that."

He was right. Like slow breathing. It seemed to emanate from inside the walls, not at a particular spot, but everywhere. We went into the hall, then the front room: it was the same there. Mixed with it now was a sort of thin crying.

"That's Nellie," Pritchard said. "The dog: she always whimpers when it's on—too scared to howl. My God, I've never heard it as loud as this before!"

"Hurry them up, will you!" I almost shouted. He went.

The "breathing" was ghastly. Slobbering. Stertorous, I think the term is. And faster. Oh, yes, I recognised it. The background music to the phone message. My skin was pure ice.

"Come along!" I yelled. I switched on the little radio to drown the noise. The old National Programme, as it was in those days, for late dance music. Believe it or not, what came through that loudspeaker was the same vile sighing noise, at double the volume. And when I tried to switch off, it stayed the same.

The whole bungalow was trembling. The Pritchards came running in, she carrying the little girl. "Get them into the car," I shouted. We heard glass smashing somewhere.

Above our heads there was an almighty thump. Plaster showered down.

Half-way out of the door the little girl screamed, "Nellie! Where's Nellie? Nellie, Nellie!"

"The dog!" Pritchard moaned. "Oh, curse it!" He dragged them outside. I dived for the kitchen, where I'd seen the animal, feeling a lunatic for doing it. Plaster was springing out of the walls in painful showers.

In the kitchen I found water everywhere. One tap was squirting like a fire-hose. The other was missing, water belching across the window from a torn end of pipe.

"Nellie!" I called.

Then I saw the dog. It was lying near the oven, quite stiff.

Round its neck was twisted a piece of painted piping with the other tap on the end.

Sheer funk got me then. The ground was moving under me. I bolted down the hall, nearly bumped into Pritchard. I yelled and shoved. I could actually feel the house at my back.

We got outside. The noise was like a dreadful snoring, with rumbles and crashes thrown in. One of the lights went out. " Nellie's run away," I said, and we all got into the car, the kids bawling. I started up. People were coming out of the other bungalows—they're pretty far apart and the din was just beginning to make itself felt.

Pritchard mumbled, " We can stop now. Think it'd be safe to go back and grab some of the furniture ? " As if he was at a fire : but I don't think he knew what he was doing.

" Daddy—look ! " screeched the boy.

We saw it. The chimney of " Minuke " was going up in a horrible way. In the moonlight it seemed to grow, quite slowly, to about sixty feet, like a giant crooked finger. And then—burst. I heard bricks thumping down. Somewhere somebody screamed.

There was a glare like an ungodly great lightning-flash. It lasted for a second or so.

Of course we were dazzled, but I thought I saw the whole of " Minuke " fall suddenly and instantaneously flat, like a swatted fly. I probably did, because that's what happened, anyway.

There isn't much more to tell.

Nobody was really hurt, and we were able to put down the whole thing to a serious electrical fault. Main fuses had blown throughout the whole district, which helped this theory out. Perhaps it was unfortunate in another respect, because a lot of people changed over to gas.

There wasn't much recognisably left of " Minuke." But some of the bits were rather unusual. Knots in pipes, for instance—I buried what was left of the dog myself. Wood and brick cleanly sliced. Small quantities of completely powdered metal. The bath had been squashed flat, like tinfoil. In fact Pritchard was lucky to land the insurance money for his furniture.

My professional problem, of course, remained. The plot where the wretched place had stood. I managed to persuade the owner it wasn't ideal for building on. Incidentally, lifting those stones might reveal something to somebody some day—but not to me, thank you !

I think my eventual solution showed a touch of wit : I let it very cheaply as a scrap-metal dump.

Well ? I know I've never been able to make any sense out of it. I hate telling you all this stuff, because it must make me seem either

a simpleton or a charlatan. In so far as there's any circumstantial evidence in looking at the place, you can see it in a moment or two. Here's the coast road . . .

The car pulled up at a bare spot beyond a sparse line of bungalows. The space was marked by a straggling, tufty square of privet bushes. Inside I could see a tangle of rusting iron : springs, a car chassis, oil drums.

" The hedge keeps it from being too unsightly," said the estate agent, as we crossed to it. " See—the remains of the gate."

A few half-rotten slats dangled from an upright. One still bore part of a chrome-plated name. " MI—" and, a little farther on, " K."

"Nothing worth seeing now," he said. I peered inside. "Not that there ever was much— Look out ! " I felt a violent push. In the same instant something zipped past my head and crashed against the car behind. " My God ! Went right at you ! " gasped the agent.

It had shattered a window of the car and gone through the open door opposite. We found it in the road beyond, sizzling on the tarmac. A heavy steel nut, white-hot.

" I don't know about you," the estate agent said, " but I'm rather in favour of getting out of here."

And we did. Quickly.

* * *

ATTENTION, PLEASE !

RULES OF THIS LODGING HOUSE

Fourpence a night for bed.
Sixpence with supper.
No more than three to sleep in one bed.
No beer allowed in the kitchen.
No smoking when in bed.
No Clothes to be washed on Sunday.
No Boots to be worn in bed.
No Dogs allowed upstairs.
No Gambling or Fighting here.
No extra charge for Luggage.
No Razor Grinders taken in.
Organ Grinders to sleep in the attick.

DONKEYS, CHAISES, HANDCARTS, and DURRIES
LET ON HIRE

MANGLING DONE HERE

Sign found over the door of an old Cornish Lodging House

THE LATE BERNARD

Is it fair? Is it just?

by ALEXANDRE ARNOUX

I ASSURE your Worship that the only reason I have not murdered my cousin Bernard sooner is that I was brought up in bourgeois surroundings amid strong religious influences. After such a childhood as mine, some force, some principle always remains to stay one on the very edge of the abyss.

My hands are clean, not blood-stained. My will, and my will alone committed the murder. What a paradox is the justice of man! I did not strangle a passer-by in a fit of drunkenness or to enable me to pay my rent, without premeditation or with the sort of miserable sympathy experienced by the matador when he gives the coup de grâce to the bull, and by the general when he sends his troops over the top. Or by God, perhaps, when he sends a saint to martyrdom, or by a little child who sucks a stick of barley-sugar, and weeps to see it melt away . . . Had I done this I would have been persecuted by my kind, and the machinery of retribution would have been set in motion.

On the contrary, I murder deliberately, my whole being approving the crime, and no one takes the slightest notice, no one interferes with me in any way. I come and go freely, my name is not struck from the electoral lists. I am not requested to resign from the vice-presidency of the Carabineers of Gros-Caillou. The blade of the guillotine remains in its sheath. Better still, I demand protection against my victim, and my demand is well founded.

As a matter of fact it is I who am the injured one in this affair. Bernard sleeps in Bagneux cemetery; he has a thirty-year concession; wreaths and a cross. What more can he want? While I, the poor murderer, the wretched assassin, the loser in the affair, I am asked to pay for an old lady's kneecap! That passes the limit. I crave your Worship's protection and will tell you the story as briefly as possible. Consider it carefully and judge. Here is my absolutely truthful report.

Bernard, saving the customary respect for the dead, was an unmitigated bounder. Tall and thin, always darkly clad, with his

small head, his arms held closely to his sides, he looked like a rolled-up umbrella or a wind-tossed cypress in a cemetery. I saw him first at the Gare de l'Est, standing on the platform beside his trunk. It was then that I was struck with his funereal appearance. The somewhat coffin-like trunk with Bernard oscillating beside it made one instinctively carry one's hand to one's hat and begin a Pater Noster. And in comparison, the coming and going of the crowd, the shrill whistle of the locomotives, the cries of the pillow-vendor seemed vain and trivial.

Bernard observed me shyly. I had just married his cousin Louise whom he had loved since childhood and who had refused him ; she had preferred my ruddy, cheerful self. In a fit of despair he had thrown himself into the Moselle. Unfortunately a misguided locks-attendant had fished him out. Ever since that episode he had retained a sort of half drowned aspect—hair, moustache, fingers and coat-tails looked as though they might easily drip : a cypress when in repose, a weeping-willow in motion.

Once in Paris he attached himself to us like a clam. Impossible to persuade him to return to his province, to his Moselle, where, after all, it is possible, with a little good will, to disappear. Having come to Paris for a few days only, he settles down there out of sheer spite and in the hope of injuring me in some way. He rents a room opposite our apartment ; he watches us from his window and invites himself to dinner three times a week. He finds a job as a commercial traveller. He is ravaged by jealousy.

I am very patient with him. It is rather flattering to be a cause of suffering to another man. He takes advantage of the situation, makes himself at home, and at the end of six weeks the trouble begins. He attempts to poison my wife's mind. He tells her that I spend my time running after other women, that the typists at my office are not remarkable for their virtue, that no one really knows how I spend my money, that it is always the most beautiful and the purest of women who are the most brazenly deceived by their husbands because they are blinded by their very purity ; that other husbands spend less on drinks, tobacco and similar indulgences and more on their wives, and so forth, and so forth . . .

My wife is impressed. If I seem to be less tender it is because I have women friends. If, on the other hand, I am gay, lover-like, pressing in my attentions, it is because other women have inspired me with desires that I seek to satisfy at home. There are sighs, concealed tears, red swollen eyes, nerves, distress, insults, plates thrown at my head, and finally silence. A frozen, deadly sepulchral silence.

I attempt to turn Bernard out of the house. Impossible. What ! I would deprive poor Louise of her one confidant, her protector,

her only consolation. There they are, the two of them, silent, terrifying. She, overcome, convulsed with sobbing; he, balancing himself on his pigeon-toed feet, shaken by a storm of commiseration and rage. And between them, myself, idiotic, violent, motionless.

That was my life, your Worship.

It lasted three years, without respite. A man brought up outside the Church could not have stood it a year. My religious upbringing enabled me to endure it for three.

However, on the first day of the third year I pull myself resolutely together, I begin my attack. I will beat him yet, this cousin who makes my life a burden; all that is necessary is to discover his weak, his vulnerable point. He is no longer in love; his hatred of me, his determination to ruin my life have taken the place of all other sentiments. It is I who now occupy Louise's old preponderant place in his thoughts, love slowly and insidiously has been superceded by deadly hatred. The possession of a woman, the ruin of a man, equal joys, ends to be attained by an equal degree of obstinate perseverance . . . but one excludes the other.

I have thought and thought again. Now Bernard lives in deadly fear of pain and disease. He carefully avoids chemists' shops when walking, he trembles before a doctor and reads his condemnation in his face. I have him!

I begin with leaving treatises on hygiene on my table. Then it is the prospectus I have sent to him, allusions to his appearance, discreet sympathetic smiles if he coughs, little attentions that worry him. Next, I take him to a lecture on tuberculosis. I invite a talkative medical student to dinner; I make him shine. He tells the story of an operation, enlarges on the unreliability of diagnostic science and the incredible abundance of bacilli. I buy a medical dictionary profusely illustrated with diagrams of cirrhosis of the liver, lung lesions, ulcers, and I lend it to Bernard to charm his leisure moments.

God be praised. I breathe again. My wife gradually becomes her normal self, she forgets her jealousy; I begin to enjoy life anew while my enemy consults, has endless analyses made, diets, and forgets me.

Wily, untiring, I torture him; I give him no peace, he becomes thin, ghastly, he fades away. No longer a cypress—a mere feather duster.

I never let him alone, I am his vice, the poison in his veins.

Louise laughs, grows plump, kisses me in dark corners, encourages my ardour.

I enjoy to the full my secret triumph.

Bernard wastes away. He lives in fear. An open window

means pneumonia; a closed one, tuberculosis. If he drinks wine he is menaced by gout; if water by typhoid; alcohol spells delirium tremens; tobacco, endocarditis. At the barber's he risks skin disease, in a restaurant unnumbered contaminations of the mouth, in the subway *grippe*, in the sun fever, in the shade goitre. Nothing is aseptic, nothing is permissible.

And as for women! Continence leads to frustrations and insanity. The most careful contact may have unimaginable results . . . paralysis, decay. What to do? A remedy, one single radical remedy to free oneself from the tortures of doubt. A remedy . . . One night, your Worship, I persuade Bernard to drink. I accompany him to a place I will not name. His will-power is gone, he gives himself up to alcohol and the rest with the zeal of a maniac.

For a week he doubts, examines himself, rebels, collapses . . . On the seventh day he turns on the gas.

And I say to myself: "What a good time we'll have." Ah, indeed! I no longer bear Bernard the slightest ill-will, I send a wreath. I have won the rubber, we are quits.

Louise cries a little, experiences a melancholy satisfaction in imagining that he died for love of her. All goes smoothly. But Bernard is not disarmed, as I learn, to my cost, on the morning of the funeral. A delicate scruple had prevented me from attending the ceremony. He might have been shocked, might he not, might have thought in his coffin: "How dead I must be, how reduced to nothing, that my cousin should follow me to the grave." I wanted to spare him that humiliation. So I pretend to have important business on which depend my chances of promotion, my future.

To go to my office I take at the École Militaire the tramcar that goes to Montrouge. Unfortunately, Bernard's funeral passes Avenue du Maine, as does the tramline. The road is up, it is congested with workmen and traffic blocks. We pass the funeral under the railway-bridge, it catches up with us at the Rue de la Gaité and we pass it again at the Rue de Vanves. Three encounters.

The first time I turn carelessly away and look absent-minded. All my hatred surges up in my heart. I will not salute Bernard the corpse when Bernard the man has given me three years of hell. Take off my hat for him. Never! An old lady in black and a midinette cross themselves, a workman lifts his cap. The street disapproves of me. I don't care. I whistle to myself. The old lady looks at me, wondering at the extent of my boorishness. In Paris one may jostle the living, but the dead must be treated with respect. The incident is over at last.

At the second encounter I stick firmly to my resolve. The lady

in black touches my elbow and shows me the hearse upon which my wreath is well in evidence. The other passengers murmur. The midinette sneers: "I don't suppose he ever had a death in his own family." The workman looks me up and down scornfully; the conductor asks me for my ticket and examines it with suspicion. I remain adamant.

But the third time, as I stamp my feet and defiantly put my hands in my pockets, the tramcar bursts with indignation. Insults and sarcastic advice rain on me from all sides. The old lady passes the utmost bound of civility. I take her by the arm, not roughly, just to calm her wrath and to prevent her from breathing into my face. The midinette squeals, conjures me to let such an old lady alone. "Old," screams the victim, "old yourself!" The workman intervenes and knocks his box of tools against my leg. Uproar, tumult, general mêlée.

The funeral has passed on and is gaining ground, a policeman pulls out his notebook, a dog barks, a chauffeur honks. The old lady recoils, misses the step, falls out on to the pavement, shrieks that she is being assassinated, and puts her kneecap out of joint. The entire tram, witness of my brutality, accuses me. The policeman takes notes. And I am sued for assault and battery and ordered to pay for the old lady's kneecap.

Is it fair, your Worship? Is it just? Am I responsible? I demand sanctuary, aid and protection. If Bernard had not come to Paris, if he had not poisoned my existence, would I have been obliged to convince him that it was necessary to die? If he were not dead, would he have had a funeral? If he had no funeral would I have neglected to salute his coffin? Would public opinion have crushed me with its resentment? Would the old lady have missed the step? Would not her precious kneecap still be working admirably? And it is I, I who must expiate, who must pay, who must hear myself condemned? No, your Worship, I know that you will defend my cause. The memory of Bernard shall go to prison, his heirs pay for the kneecap. Otherwise, fear the despair of an honest mortal driven to the utmost extremity.

* * *

PRECAUTION

I must go back to a vest again, for that which most I dread
Is a bad cold, a head cold, and a day, or more, in bed;
And all I ask is a friend's advice, and a short time for thinking,
A soft wool, and a man's size, and a good bit for shrinking.

G. F. BRADBY

BOON COMPANIONS

We are so fond of one another, because our ailments are the same

JONATHAN SWIFT

If people ask me,
I always tell them :
" Quite well, thank you, I'm very glad to say."
If people ask me,
I always answer,
" Quite well, thank you, how are you today ? "
I always answer,
I always tell them,
If they ask me
Politely . . .
BUT SOMETIMES
I wish
That they wouldn't.

A. A. MILNE, *When We Were Very Young*

Compensations

My dear Fanny—

I had a slight return of fever last night, which terminated favourably, and I am now tolerably well, though weak from small quantity of food to which I am obliged to confine myself: I am sure a mouse would starve upon it. Mrs. Wylie came yesterday. I have a very pleasant room for a sick person. A Sopha bed is made up for me in the front Parlour which looks on to the grass plot as you remember Mrs. Dilkes does.

How much more comfortable than a dull room upstairs, where one gets tired of the pattern of the bed curtains. Besides I see all that passes—for instance now, this morning, if I had been in my own room I should not have seen the coals brought in. On Sunday between the hours of twelve and one I descried a Pot boy. I conjectured it might be the one o'Clock beer—Old women with bobbins and red cloaks and unpresuming bonnets I see creeping about the heath. Gipseys after hare skins and silver spoons. Then goes by a fellow with a wooden clock under his arm that strikes a hundred and more. Then comes the old French emigrant, (who

has been very well to do in France) with his hands joined behind on his hips, and his face full of political schemes . . .

JOHN KEATS, 1795-1821, *in a letter to Fanny Keats*

Incurable

Sir Edward Coke being now very infirme in body, a friend of his sent him two or three Doctors to regulate his health; whom he told, that he had never taken phisick since he was borne, and would not now begin; and that he had now upon him a disease, which all the drugges of Asia, the gold of Africa, the silver of America, nor all the Doctors of Europe could cure, OLD AGE. He therefore both thankt them and his friend that sent them, and dismist them nobly with a reward of twenty pieces to each man.

JOSEPH MEAD, *in a letter*, 1630

Blowing Cold

There was once a great conflux of people in Abdera, a City of the Greeks, at the acting of the Tragedy of Andromeda, upon an extreme hot day: whereupon a great many of the spectators falling into Fevers had this accident from the heat and from the Tragedy together, that they did nothing but pronounce Iambics, with the names of Perseus and Andromeda; which, together with the Fever, was cured by the coming on of Winter.

THOMAS HOBBES, 1588-1679, *Leviathan*

Just Desert

Coughing in a shady grove
Sat my Juliana.
Lozenges I gave my love,
Ipecacuanha—
Full twenty from the lozenge box
The greedy nymph did pick;
Then sighing sadly, said to me
My Damon, I am sick.

GEORGE CANNING, 1770-1827, *Compassionate Herbs*

By A Hair

Poor Dr. Shawe being sént for in great haste to Claremont—it seems the duchess had caught a violent cold by a hair of her own whisker getting up her nose and making her sneeze.

HORACE WALPOLE, *in a letter to Lady Hervey*, 1758

Indisposed

Sir, My pa requests me to write to you, the doctors considering it doubtful whether he will ever recuvver the use of his legs which prevents his holding a pen.

CHARLES DICKENS, 1812-1870, *Nicholas Nickleby*

Simple

Furthermore as concerning the health that cometh by a beard, we may prove by this, that for nourishing of himself, it sucketh out the abundant and gross humours from the cheeks, and by that means it preserveth the teeth long from perishing: which doth not lightly happen to those that are often shaven. For they (for the most part) are either toothless long before their time, or else they have very much pain of the toothache. Moreover in the hot summer it defendeth the face from the burning and parching of the sun's beams: and in the winter it beareth off the cold storms and sharp blasts of the wind: and it saveth a man from the quinsy, the gum piles, and many other diseases . . .

JOHN PIERIUS, 1533

Cure

. . . I began the operation of the pump to-day; it is no bad rehearsal of purgatory. The patient is naked in a little subterraneous apartment, where there is a tube of hot water, which a woman directs wherever you choose. This state of nature, in which you wear scarcely a fig-leaf of clothing is very humiliating. . . . Think of a spout of boiling water pouring upon one or other of your poor limbs! It is at first applied to every part of the body, in order to rouse the animal spirits, and then to the joints affected; but when it comes to the nape of the neck, the heat creates a surprise which it is impossible to describe. This, however, is the main point. It is necessary to suffer, and we do suffer; we are not quite scalded to death, and are then put into a warm bed, where we sweat profusely, and this is the cure . . .

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ,
in a letter to Madame de Grignan, May, 1676

R.I.P.

Cur'd yesterday of my disease,
I died last night of my physician.

MATTHEW PRIOR, 1664-1721,
The Remedy Worse Than the Disease

HURRICANE

"I am throwing away something of great value," she thought. "And I cannot help it"

by DOROTHY COTTRELL

WEATHER. *Bureau Report*, 10-15 *a.m.*, *October* 31. "*Storm Information: Tropical Disturbance, apparently of slight intensity, central a short distance east or south-east of Antigua Leeward Islands. Probably moving westward . . .*"

Weather is a vast thing; its record embracing oceans. Thus, in the terminology of weather, the Caribbean Hurricane Season is a part of the North Atlantic Hurricane Season: on the maps of weather, the tracks of the great storms born in the doldrums may sprawl and curve across half a world. In their passage they may influence six million square miles of ocean, batter the face of continents and change the aspect of cities, while cities count their dead in hundreds; but the ocean flows back, a continent is self-healing, a city re-forms itself. It is for the little islands and their fleets that they may be the end of the world . . .

In the living quarters of the hospital on Three Rock, Elizabeth, the doctor's wife, thought oppressingly of her husband. The heat of the stove came up at her in invisible waves, so that she pushed back her damp hair from her hot face. Through the open window she could see her husband returning across the long compound, past the radio tower . . . A big man, he moved with lithe strength, holding his shoulders hunched a little with a sort of belligerent power. Physically fair-complexioned, he conveyed sombreness. Except for her and the coloured children, his face had often an expression of weariness and hardness; a gravity of concentration and abstraction.

She thought: "Perhaps he gets on so well with these people because he is like them. Somehow mystical, obstinate, hard to understand." He had something of ruthlessness that was kin to the islands. Yet he was a selflessly kind man under the hardness. He loved her as unconvivial, austere and irritable natures love. He was too thorny for casual friendships; too exasperating to be loved unless he was loved deeply. She had loved him in this way.

He was beset now by small coloured children who made a

noise like birds in the jungle; and it was his thirty-fourth birthday. She thought: "I am going to break something he believes absolutely." She thought: "I cannot help it."

She thought back to great dreams, when she had believed in his great dreams . . . She had looked at him and thought: "I am the wife of a young Pasteur—of a Lister—of a Pierre Curie! What does it matter what we give up? What does it matter what I miss? I am the wife of a great man!"

His passion had been the study of tropical diseases. Only she had known the depth of his passion. ". . . If we can strike the cure for that one thing—for just that one thing—it will change the lives of millions of people . . . Somewhere there's an answer. Someone has to find it. Why not us?" She had believed that they would find it. In the long experiments she had believed . . . She had loved him most of all in the long experiments! Most men played life for pleasure; for self. The scientist, whose life was service to a divine and selfless curiosity, seemed to her a creature more than mortal. In giving herself to her husband she had felt that a young god stepped down from a high altar to honour with his love a daughter of men.

To his dream they had paid out everything that makes normal life. Her feet had bruised on jungle thorns as she followed her god; she had left youth and her beauty in the jungles . . . Not for discoveries to shake the lives of men! For drab struggles in ill-equipped hospitals, poorly staffed medical missions, in the final hopeless isolation of this island!

He had said to her: "I don't want laboratory work only. I want to pay my wage to life as I go along." Once it had seemed to her movingly beautiful . . . before she had begun to see him as an impoverished tropical doctor struggling against the inherent hopelessness of the Tropics. He did not see it in that way . . .

She wished that she could not see him now; where sleeping-hibiscus flowers were falling in the garden and there was a great scent of coconut blossoms. He was down on one knee and his blue shirt drew pleasantly across the muscles of his shoulders as his fair head rose above the bobbing dark ones like an island of steadiness and affection. He was beautiful in his manner with the children. The children laughed up at him. Then, jumping up, he came towards her.

She said: "Hallo, Hugh!" She went up to him. "Very happy birthday!"

He put his hand under her chin; his eyes studying her face with the sort of awareness of the beloved that comes from unusual circumstance. She was conscious of the heat and wetness of her face. She raised her eyebrows questioningly.

He said: "Just—you are a very beautiful woman . . . You were beautiful when we married—but you're more beautiful now . . . When I see you with the children or the animals, I think 'That must be the most beautiful face in the world!'" He said it as a man might say that the sun was bright or the sea blue.

He loved her astonishingly; but without awareness of the unusual in so loving—as a man might love sea or sun. In the pressure of their life, there was seldom time for the expression of love in words. When he did speak his love for her, he said astonishing things to her; without knowing that they were unusual things for a man to say to a woman who had been his wife for ten years. The tenderness in it touched her. The blindness angered her. She was not more beautiful. She was thirty-one, but already there was webbing of silver in the light brown hair at her temples. She thought: "It has come there through hurrying—and never catching up!" She said: "I'm a mess."

He said positively, dismissing the matter: "I've never seen you when you didn't look beautiful!"

She thought: "He is absolutely sure of my love; absolutely loves me!"

Because he was going to suffer, she wanted this day, that was his birthday, to be happy for him. Stirring the pot of corn-mush, she smiled at him. She said: "We're going fishing! Remember?" She waited for him to argue. He would say: "I've a hundred things I should be doing . . ." She was ready to answer: "You've only one birthday a year. For once, you're going to do what you like to do!" At last he would say, with the almost shy pleasure of pride which he took in her love: "You spoil me! . . . But, all right then, let's go!"

Instead, moving to the table and putting out his pipe, he said: "I'm afraid we can't. There's a storm posted . . . I'll have to fix up the hospital." He elaborated: "There's a good chance she won't develop. This is October the thirty-first—and a good chance she'll miss us. But there's always a lot to do."

With the infinity of storm preparation there could be no argument—and hatred of the tropics flared in her. Even the small joy of this day they could defeat; with vastness of storm; dwarfing small human plans . . .

She thought: "I love my husband. But I am going to leave him. He does not know it. Does not dream it." She thought: "I love him so—but I cannot help it—I cannot stay in the prison of this place!"

The mush was finished and she pulled it aside and began to squeeze cream from the grated flesh of coconuts. She had already filled glasses with the clear coconut milk. She packed the squeezed

coconut down in a bowl for use later in puddings and sweets. She called the coloured children to their meal in the hospital nursery; carried trays to the patients in the ward. She thought: "When I am not here, who will be doing the things I do? Will he be trying to do them alone?" The thought of him alone gave her agony.

The light caught his hair and his fine shoulders where he leaned above a map, studying the position of the storm and the charts showing the storm tracks of fifty years. He was neither perturbed nor excited. Hurricane could wipe out the work of years; but he was thinking only what it was best to do. At the edge of destruction, he would be thinking the same thing.

It occurred to her that she had never seen him unhappy. The experiments failed; and his face was grave with new thought; and he began again . . . On the night a month ago when they had received the offer of a great position in a great hospital, and he had said that he was not going to take it, she had come as close as love could to asking him what there would be for him if the experiments always failed.

It had not occurred to her that he had faced this thought. He had, with his underlying calm of purpose. He had stood still a second with his hands in his pockets. She said with contrition: "I didn't mean to hurt you. I'm tired tonight."

He said: "You didn't hurt me. Since I stopped being a kid, I've known always: 'I may fail. At the end of everything, I may not be one step further. How am I going to like that?' I had to find the answer to that . . . It's a hard answer to take, but it's a good answer. I knew: 'It won't matter so long as I've *tried*! The only thing that would matter would be to beat myself—to fail because I hadn't tried hard enough.'"

He looked at her with the half-smile in his eyes. "Do you know what every discovery is based on? It's based on all the lives of all the hacks who failed to discover it. Who contributed nothing but the wrong answers. And the men who discovered, not the whole, but one little piece of the puzzle . . . And none of them can ever *know* what they're going to add to the pile. Whether it will be nothing—or a scrap—or the works. They can't worry about that—or the whole thing would fall down . . ."

He relit his pipe. "I read a rather good story once about a woodsman who scrapped his farm and his family's security to go to war, and all he did was to die slowly of some disease—being a nuisance to everyone—without ever getting into the fight at all. When the wife was a very old lady telling her grandchildren, she found the answer to it. It didn't matter that he hadn't been able to fight. The army was a whole. There had to be those killed by

accident—those who fell ill . . . They filled their place just the same. It was a sentimental story, but it was true, too."

She said: "Or an excuse for failure and a solace for waste?"

"I don't think so. About us—at the end there may be nothing to show for it. But you can't stop because of that. If you did, the whole thing would stop—for the men who make the discoveries are in the same boat—until they make them, they're clutching at nothing, too." He smiled his beautiful smile at her. "I'm a bit of a coward, really! That's why I've wanted to keep up actual practice as well, to stay here. I wanted to be able to say: 'If the big things end in nothing, I'll still have helped a lot of babies into the world—and stopped a few kids from growing up with bent bones so no one would want to make love to them on a moonlight night!'"

He relit his pipe. "Next to you, that's been my sort of inside fire that I warm my hands at when I'm feeling low."

Her mind cried out: "To what purpose? My dear, my dear, what does all your care and all your eagerness accomplish? The great waves of ignorance and cruelty and obstinacy and over-population wash back over you!" She cried: "They are such trash, Hugh! The most maddening, frustrating trash on earth!"

Tireder than she, he stood in the lamplight, his pipe in his hand. "'As obstinate as a Three Islander'? 'As ignorant as a Three Islander'? Or a sombre, darkly-dreaming people, not quite like any others. Coloured people, who don't think of themselves as coloured, but as Three Islanders . . . And, very long ago, runaway slaves and shipwrecked pirates lit fires on the island beaches—and there are families whose line goes back through three hundred years. And the men are big men and many of the women are beautiful, and there is a red note in their bronze that may mean there were Caribs on the islands in the dead centuries. And the people are illiterate—and speak a most beautiful and ancient English. They are unafraid of storms—and very much afraid of ghosts; poor beyond belief—and proud as the kings of Africa."

"You love them, don't you?"

He grinned. "Most of the time I'd like to break their necks!"

Now, turning from the map to take his coffee, he said of the storm: "We'll know better when we get the next report. But we'd better start getting ready. I've sent schooners to warn Great Three and Little Three."

Weather Bureau Report, 10-13 p.m., October 31st. "Storm Information: The Tropical Disturbance is central about sixty miles

south-west of Saint Kitts, Leeward Islands . . . Of slight to moderate intensity."

The North Atlantic Hurricane Season spawns its children on an average of seven a year. Some fail to attain hurricane force—although elsewhere in the world they would be great storms; some fifty per cent become full hurricanes; perhaps a dozen in a century, the Great Hurricanes; three to four in a century, the great amongst the great; dwarfing the Titans that are their brothers; dwarfing man's conception of force; blowing into the history of weather; so that, centuries from their passage, men may use their record as a standard of comparison and a challenge to belief.

As the Weather Bureaux of the Western Hemisphere began to click out the first reports of the hurricane of October 30th to November 13th, the turtle fleet of Great Three in Three Islands rode south of the Windwards. These ships are built on slips cut in the coral amongst the wild lilies, of mahogany that was young when Columbus sighted the New World. It is their practice to "go home"—rather than to "shelter"—when warned of hurricane; since a man likes to be with his wife and family in time of hurricane, as it may always be his last opportunity; and, if a family dies, it is good that it dies together . . .

Abraham, the eleven-year-old son of the Senior Captain, woke to blue day in what must be the bluest spot on earth, to find his father's schooner under way; to see across a second sky, transparent as air, pierced with blue sunrays—the schools of little fish racing, this way and that, all together!—the washing sea-meadows of the Gulf weed, clear in every berry on the shining blue; now to gusts which spread like tides of silver, dipping through blinding silver towards the blue peaks.

"*Why*, Father? Why are we under way?"

His father, a great, bronzed man with a gold tooth, replied majestically: "There is storm report. We go to inform the ships: 'Best gather your turtle!'"

"Why didn't you wake me, Father?"

"I thought the storm might manage very well without you," his father said; and smiled.

"Father, is it a big storm? Is it a hurricane, Father?"

"The day a child is born you do not ask 'Is he a big man?'" his father said.

"Did the word come by the wireless, Father?"

"The wireless is not of God. No ship of Great Three would carry it. The word came from those who have it. Not all men walk with God as the men of Three Islands," his father said. He added kindly: "Though the Good Doctor is a very fine man . . ."

"Mister Doctor knows all things! He tells me many things! I have flying-fish wings in my box of things for the Good Doctor! When I am a captain and am given a gold watch, I will give it to the Good Doctor!"

"The Good Doctor must still wait some while to tell the time by it," his father said.

Not time enough—yet time so long upon earth, Jacob, the dark Mate, thinks. Work—for which there was never quite time enough. Hard work; straining men and wearing them out young . . . As each great turtle was lifted, dripping, from the sea, a man could think: "That is so many pounds of flour. So much sugar. So many ship's biscuits for my children. That is a gallon of coconut oil for frying. That is so many yards of dotted Swiss for my wife." It gave a man a great sense of power to lift the things his family needed from the sea! Yet a man could never lift quite enough. Always, in thinking of a man's family, there was fear—until the Good Doctor taught him of the miracle that is the Life Insurance Policy!

Now, if he must, Jacob can die without panic. He need fear only for the lives of his family. That is a less terrible fear—for death is kinder than life.

Angel, the young Head-Net-Man, thinks of seventeen-year-old Justine, the whisky seller's daughter. Her people had forbidden their thinking of marriage. They had taken the old, direct way of the islands; to try to get her with child so that they must marry. The girl had suggested it—in the starlight on the coral where the lilies made the air sweet over the sea. "Take me! If we were to have a child, they must say 'yes'!" . . .

And afterwards, leaning above her as she lay beautiful in the starlight, he asked: "You know how I love you? You are not sorry or afraid?"

She laughed like a sound of music.

"Afraid of *you*? I love you! I trust you with my life! For the first time in my life, I know what it is to be happy!"

His heart melted to the trust of it. He said: "I would die for you! You know that?"

Now he thought with horror of fear: "What if what we wished should come to pass—but I should die? . . . Justine, my dearling, my dearling! If it should befall and I am not there, go first to the Good Doctor! He will not let them hold meeting on the dock over your shame! He will care for you that you may have our child in love!"

Martin, the young Second Mate, is grieving for a thing undone.

His betrothed was 'Vangeline, the young school teacher. She had wished that they marry, but he had answered: "Not until I am first mate of a schooner and can give you a life that is befitting!"

Her eyes were grave. "The women who wait for the boats pretend that they are waiting for letters—but they are waiting for men who do not come back. I could wait and not grow strange—if it was for ever—if we had been married."

"I have beheld what such waiting is, 'Vangeline!" he said against the beating of his heart. "I saw my mother make the mush thin with water and grow thin setting the mush before me and the smaller one. I saw her eyes as she mixed the mush. She could pretend she was not hungered. But her eyes could not help looking at the mush and thinking of it. She was still young and even a mother can be very hungry when she is young. After she had served her children she scraped the pot and ate the scrapings slowly so they would seem longer."

"If we do not marry, Martin, and you were lost, I would be hungry all my life! Do not let me be hungry all my life, Martin!"

Against all the hunger of youth and love, he had denied her against all his love. He had said sternly: "You must be patient, 'Vangeline! We must not be very foolish!"

Now he thought: "What if I should never drink her sweetness—nor she mine? If she be lost, I will have kept from her what she wished. If death befall me, do not wait, 'Vangeline! Go to the Good Doctor! Let him send you to the teachers' school far away!"

Gambi, the half-wit cook, hurrying with coffee for the hurrying men, speaks of his dog. Already the Good Doctor has been of great comfort in the matter of the dog; having given promise that the butcher should not cheat the dog of its daily pennyworth of meat while Gambi was away. Cackling as he passes the great mugs, Gambi asserts: "Old Man Hurricane get me, who get my dog? Mister Doctor get my dog!" He is not sure. He hopes. Only the figure of the doctor stands between him and the ultimate horror of the dog going confidently for its meat and there being no meat . . .

Men, loading the turtle, hurry! But the crawls are full, the turtle thrash and struggle—and a grown turtle weighs hundreds of pounds and is as strong as wire cable. Men work, until it seems they have no further strength to work; and still, in some far, trembling place, keep working. Men work until there is a pain in their hearts like a little fire that runs to and fro; and the trembling shakes their bodies. Until they must lean back on the last strength there is; thinking—though thinking is difficult: "Each turtle is for her . . ."

And the storm has passed from the Atlantic into the Caribbean. The storm is "of probable hurricane force." The storm is "of hurricane force." The storm is not yet known as what it is, one of the giants of history . . . The turtle ships, piling sail for home, find the storm across their path—and must turn instead for Cuba and the market.

The Senior Captain urges: "Be of good cheer! As yet the storm moves from our homes. Should the storm still recurve, the Good Doctor will tend the people well! We are very fortunate to have the Good Doctor and his wife—and they appreciate the honour of living in Three Islands!"

Weather Bureau Report, 11-40 *p.m.*, *November 8th.* "*Storm Information: Tropical Disturbance . . . Recurving to north or north-east . . . Special observations requested . . .*

At the point of recurve to the south and south-west of Jamaica, it was one of the most intense tropical cyclones ever recorded anywhere in the world . . ."

For the storm of which men will argue if it is not the fiercest of all the years of all the seas, has swung through the Caribbean for a thousand miles; to feel at last the calling of the Pole; turning with the swing of the continents; increasing its forward speed. Its whirling edges tear into the surface of the sea; turning the sea to foam and the foam to mist and the mist to a great cry that is a scream that is a thunder, and a thunder that passes the capacity of hearing.

The sea rises before it, unable to fall back against the winds and ever piling upon itself. Great rains precede it. Through darkness, white sea-rivers rush down the foothills of the sea; and the foothills dance before the hurricane. The storm is a thing of terror and a thing of triumph; for it has burst the restrictions that confine the winds. Winds of seventy-five miles an hour are winds of hurricane force. This storm has turned before Central America blowing two hundred and ten sustained.

On Three Rock the roof of the jungle is beginning to complain with the leafy roar of foliage under great wind. It is the night of the Eighth. Still the people cannot believe. "Three Islands have been safe from full hurricane for one hundred years. Three Islanders walk with God."

Climbing from the shelter of the jungle on to the plateau of the hospital compound, Elizabeth staggered weightless in an invisible river of air. Through the roaring of the jungle and the cry of the palms was a constant, ever-rising song; the multitudinous, silken hiss of torn air.

In the beam of the torch, the horizontally flying rain burst as

water-smoke from the surfaces it contacted; so that the illusion was of water burning. The buildings vibrated under the tremendous impact of air.

Hugh, who had been to the North Settlement, came in on her heels. He streamed with water and his shirt was torn, but his eyes were alight from conflict with the wind. He said: "I was worried for you! . . . I suppose they wouldn't come?" She thought: "He is fitted for conflict. He's worked to death—and tonight he looks almost a boy."

He went to the glass. "Twenty-eight, ten . . ." Attempting to roll a cigarette between wet fingers, he turned to her. "I've sent 'Vangeline and the children up to the Cave—and the patients. Also Gambi's dog. I wish you'd go. I can look after things here." (The Cave, with its elevation of eighty feet, was the safest refuge on the island, but there was a better chance of saving the hospital if they remained in the buildings. A loose shutter could wreck a building.)

She said: "We had that argument out long ago." She thought: "It's strange when I'm leaving him for ever that I couldn't leave him tonight."

He glanced at the falling glass; turned restlessly. "I wish to God those fools would have come!" The cigarette stuck to his fingers. He said slowly, with his unexpected quality of analytical detachment that argued against his own anger: "I suppose if just about everyone who had come near us for three centuries had come to grab or plunder or lie, we wouldn't be so blasted tractable. I suppose it does produce obstinacy." He grinned at her. "Blast this cigarette!"

She said: "Your hands are too wet. Come and change your clothes!" She had always loved his hands. She put her hand on his shoulder and knew its firm beauty. Beyond his familiar shoulder the falling glass spoke of danger.

The nearness of the possibility of death adds new visibility to the face and form of the beloved; a tenderness of infinite pain. She felt such a rush of love for him that she said: "Hugh, when you've seen them through the storm, won't you reconsider that job?"

He said absently: "I'm afraid I can't, darling."

She thought: "He isn't even listening."

He said, thinking of the people, and at last getting his cigarette drawing: "If they are blown flat, I'm certainly going to put up a fight to get them to build farther from the sea!"

She thought: "I love him. I will love him till I die. But I cannot help it. I cannot stay here. No more than if I was carried away by the hurricane tide!"

Sound was now the silken scream of torn air with the undernote of endless thunder. The rooms were filling with spray in which the lamps hissed protestingly. The vibration jarred the flesh. Elizabeth made coffee. At the end of eight days of labour, suddenly there was nothing more to do. They would wait now—through many hours—to see what the storm would do to them. The glass was still falling.

Turning from the glass with his hands in his pockets, Hugh came towards the table; moving in the restlessness of incredible weariness. He said: "I've been thinking . . ." The faintly feverish flush of great weariness was on his face.

Elizabeth went to the table and stood with her hands on it.

He said: "I've been thinking, after we get the storm cleaned up, we'll take a holiday. I can get Will to come from Havana and take over for a couple of months. You could choose where you'd like to go!" He turned about with his short, restless step. "You're rather a precious thing, you know! And you deserve a holiday."

She said nothing. He leaned on the table. "I wasn't meaning to plan everything. I thought that was what you would like. It's to be your holiday; what you want!" He smiled at her. "I've been watching you today and thinking 'No one ever like her!'—and there isn't!"

She said: "Hugh . . . I'm going away."

Fear jumped in his eyes. "You're not ill?"

"Not like that. I don't know if I'm ill in my mind . . . I just can't take it any more. It just doesn't seem to me worth-while any more. We work and work—and the days come up and go down—and we're shut in with work and heat—and there's nothing to show for it!" She saw his face touched with a great pain and a great sadness. She asked: "What *is* there to show for it?"

The roar of the wind shook the house. He looked at his hand on the table; holding his cigarette. "That's rather hard to answer."

"We struggle to deliver children and to keep them alive—and the standards of living undo what we've done. Little Abraham's as clever a child as you'd find in the world—and he won't get the chance of a pedigreed pup. Martin's a good boy and loves a girl. He's worked until his heart is giving him trouble. And if he does get her, what will happen to them? They'll have too many children too fast and she'll get shabby and fretful and all the beauty will go out—"

"They'll have touched beauty," he said in a remote voice. He was not looking at her but at his hand on the table. He raised his face. "You mean our life doesn't pay out for you any more? I

know it's hard—and barren of most things. Yet to me it's been very important. Very beautiful—because you were with me. I've never pictured life without you. I don't know how much importance the things I've thought important would have for me without you."

In his eyes was a sort of introspective question; the expression of a man evaluating his life. It was very terrible to her. He said: "It may seem strange to you to tell you how much I have loved you. I mean—after what you've said—I can see that I haven't given you very much. I don't quite know what I thought I gave you. I imagine that I loved you so much that I thought of you as part of myself; didn't consider you, as one doesn't bother considering one's self. I can see that to you I must have seemed abominably selfish."

"You are not selfish!" Her lips formed a rather bitter smile. "If you were selfish, there might be more chance for us. You were just born to tilt at windmills—made of the stuff martyrs are made of."

"The tilting could pan out, you know!"

"I don't care if it does! What does it matter if it does? What thanks do you get for all that you do here? And here, at least, the things you do are concrete things. You save people's lives—and they cheat you out of your bill. You cure people—and they go out and get infected again. 'The service of the good of mankind' is a lovely phrase. I've come to doubt the necessity of the one and the existence of the other. I don't like the taste of humanity. I've had to take it too raw."

He said slowly—of the people: "It's an awful path they've come . . . Savagery of nature. Savagery of men. And still they reach out—so blindly, so timidly—to a little beauty and goodness!"

"At times everything in the world seems evil to me!"

"At times one gets tired," he said. "But I have never found an ugliness without a glory to set against it."

"I wish I had your eyes. To me it seems, 'Of dog eat dog, of mighty crush the weak.'"

"*You* are the one answer to me! Then there's the other . . . An old Spanish doctor of biology said it to me, 'We don't know where we're going—or why we came. But if in the place we are needed, we can be there—never adding to the world's pain, perhaps adding a little to the world's kindness—the "why" no longer matters.'"

"I don't care—very much—about answers any more, Hugh. I'm tired! Tired down to the bottom of the heart."

He came round the table to her, putting his hand on her shoulder. "I'm sorry, darling! Will you let me try to see you aren't too tired any more?"

" Not in this place, Hugh ! Anyone living in this place has to believe with you. I don't believe any more. Parting with you is like parting with my breath. But—if you are staying here—I want a divorce."

He withdrew his hand from her shoulder; turning to pace about the room. " I don't know what to say to that ! I'm afraid I can't think divorce between us without a little time to get used to thinking it. It's like finding the sun doesn't rise. It takes time to believe it."

She said : " I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Hugh ! "

He was turned away from her, but he put out his hand in a backward gesture and lightly touched hers. She put her arms on the table and her head down on her arms. She heard the great sound of the incredible rain, the ever-rising wind ; then Hugh's voice behind her.

He said restlessly : " I don't know that it's much of an offering to make to a woman, but I've loved you. Very much." She raised her face to him. He said—as if to himself almost : " Some loves—long loves—get under the skin so that they don't pass ! Some things are special to two people . . . It's special to us that we used to save for a show and buy one sandwich and share it. That we were so damn hungry ! "

He turned about the room again ; restless as the gale. " It must seem to you that you've got nothing for it. But you have been loved . . . I don't think there's ever been a time when I haven't felt plain gladness going home to you. When the thought of that homecoming hasn't been the best thing in the day for me."

She thought : " I am throwing away something of great value—but I cannot help it ! " She leaned her face on the table again. She thought of him : " At the end of his loving, he has lost his wife."

He said : " I suppose it shouldn't be such a frightful, unholy shock. It happens . . . I've always believed in divorce if anyone wanted it. Yet I'm rather amazed at what it does to me. It's more than ending—it's coming unravelled. It's all our life there—a pattern—then no pattern." He moved about the room with his swinging, lithe step ; stopped beside her. " It's having felt and believed so much that you could never quite feel and believe again."

" I'm sorry, Hugh ! "

" It's as though there are some places you should go to only once—because you can only really see them once."

" Don't, Hugh ! "

" I'm not wanting to be dramatic. I think I'm trying to know what I'm feeling. If you know a thing, you can do something

about it. You've said just four little words—'I want a divorce.' One should be able to listen to any words quietly and reasonably. They shouldn't hurt so damned much . . . You've got to be a little patient. If you were a heavyweight champion and had got me in the solar plexus you couldn't have got more effect. That's rather what it feels like. It's pretty interesting. The physical effect of mental pain, I suppose. It's quite surprising."

"I hate to hurt you!"

He moved about the room with the dark hunched power that was part of him. "Is it me you don't love? Are you tired of me?"

"No, Hugh! But Hugh, if you love me, why don't you take the job in the hospital? Why do you have to stay here? It's being buried alive! It's seeing the days go and the years go—and having none of the things that make life beautiful! Only raw, messy life!" She stood up. "It isn't a little thing to give up all that! We've done enough! I think if you loved me, you might say 'There may be nothing afterwards except the dark—as there was nothing before. I want her to be happy in the little while.'" She stepped before him and caught his shoulders. "Please, Hugh, don't starve us all our lives!" His shoulders were hard under her hands. "Please, Hugh! Take that job!"

"I don't take that job—because I can't! It's something stronger than me—stronger than my need of you. And I love you all right! I don't offer you much else. But I do love you! . . . If I took that job, I'd be going back on something in myself. On loving you. In the limits of my capacity, I've brought you . . . pride. I've come to you proud. I know I didn't create this place—that it will be here a thousand years after I'm dead. But if I quit and took something soft, I'd be ashamed—it would get into my love for you and spoil my love for you!"

"But why? We might never have come here! You might never have known the damned, hopeless place . . ."

"It's always hard to separate what you're doing from vanity. It's easy and flattering to think you're indispensable. But then it's easy to say of everything, 'It's no responsibility of mine!' I might never have come here. But I did. Before I came, they hadn't had a resident doctor for twenty years."

"If they paid decently, they might have!"

"How can they? At least, how can the people who need the doctor? If we went, they might have no one for years . . ."

"Then let them solve their own problem! We aren't God!"

"They won't solve it! And I'm not God—but I make a difference."

She dropped her hands from his shoulders and went back to

the table. He resumed his pacing about the room, more slowly now. He came to the opposite side of the table and leaned his hands on it. " Do you want to know how it works ? It's long and boring and I don't want it to be like that, but that's how it is. If I leave them, do you know what it's going to do to me ? "

His voice caught its low note of passion ; an unwilling, angered prophecy : " When I take you in my arms and we are happy, I'll think of lovers here who will never be happy—because of disease I could have prevented.

" When we're giving a dinner party and everything's good food and comfort, I'll know there may be a girl here dying in childbirth because there is no one who knows how to help her. I'll know she shrieks because the pain is too much—and tries to be brave—because women in childbirth are horribly brave—and prays not to be hurt so—and the prayer does no good.

" For, if there is a God, He means man to help man. I'll know she would be so grateful for a little help—we've seen them smile when they were in unbearable pain. And I'd be taking it easy. My body would be comfortable—eating—loving—sleeping—while her's was being torn to pieces ! If I went to you then, I'd be damned ! . . . When we saw something beautiful, I'd know there were babies here who would never see—blind from birth—bumping their heads as they learned to crawl—and trying to smile as if it was natural to bump things. They'd be blind because I wasn't there to let them see . . . I'd know of myself : ' Whatever happens to you—however bad it is—you can't be sorry for yourself. You've cut yourself off from the right to pity.' That's the worst thing that can happen to anyone. Perhaps I'm too much of a coward to have it happen ! Anyway, I can't buy you on those terms . . . I've had to feel clean with you. To feel I brought you the best I was. I love you too much to want you any other way. And I want you rather more than I want my life."

" They don't appreciate it, Hugh ! Don't appreciate you ! "

" I think you can be wrong. But I don't give a damn if they do or they don't ! I wouldn't care if they had no more than sheep ! This is something between me and the inside of me ! I'm sorry if you're caught in it and it's wrong for you. I think if I've ever prayed it's been that you would be happy. I've wanted happiness more for you than for myself. It may be an absurdity that I thought you'd have it. But I wanted it for you—and I thought you had it."

" You have been very good to me, Hugh ! "

" I don't know about that. I don't know quite why I thought you were happy—unless I thought that to be loved as I loved you was payment. For what love is worth, I have loved you ! . . .

They say ' What is love ? ' I know what loving you has been to me ! So that you won't feel your own life has been complete waste—I want you to know I have loved you. It's been the utmost capacity for emotion that was in me . . . I hadn't believed in love as the *grande passion.* Then I met you . . . I hadn't thought love could be more than biology. I hadn't thought it could mean to me what it meant when we were going to marry. Longing and wonder and unbelief . . .

" Do you remember what we said to each other that first night ? We said : ' This isn't just for now. This—if we value it—is for always. It's us, together. Never one alone ; for we've felt for each other what we feel now. Let's never lose tonight—for little things and ugly things and things that don't really matter. Let's always keep tonight. What we feel now is more than either of us. Let us never push each other so far away that we see each other without the tenderness. For if we once tear it to pieces we can't put it together in eighty years.' . . .

" You never have. You have never done anything that could push me away until I saw you without tenderness . . . Oh, I know ! The rapture and the wonder become—daily bread ! But with tenderness and laughter and friendship across it. For your tenderness and your kindness and your friendship, I've loved you more with every day we've been together. . . When I've been so damned tired I felt I couldn't go any farther—when there were epidemics or storms—I've just thought of you. Just seen you. And I could go ahead. You've been a warm fire to me—and food—and rest ! You've been with me always : the surely good thing of the world."

" I've loved you, Hugh ! I love you ! But I can't endure this place any more ! If you love me, take me away ! "

" I love you—but I can't. I've the advantage of you. I can see that. I don't mind it as you mind it ; I even rather like it. I rather wish I didn't—since I'm the one who's saying ' Here we stay ! ' . . . But at times I hate it. I get hungry for good talk—and l...dge—and just to walk down a city street. I can see you're being robbed. I know we came here by chance—it isn't my responsibility that there are such places—but I'm stuck with it. It's like finding a wounded animal as you're driving somewhere. It isn't your resposibility—but you can't go on and leave it. I can't quit—even if it means losing you."

" Do you know what I've wished sometimes ? That you were a weaker man. That you didn't know so exactly where you were going. If I knew you might go to the devil if I left you, I might stay. But you'll go on just the same whether I'm here or not."

" Yes. I'll manage and I'll go on . . . But if you think it

makes no difference, you're wrong. Having you has made beautiful what could be ugly. It's made rich what could be barren . . . I've leaned over you at night and watched you sleeping and thought: 'There, beside me, is all I really need of the world. There is proof things aren't rotten. There is reason for everything that a man might ever hope to do.' To me, you've been the good of the world . . . That's a sentimental phrase. But it's my truth. When I've come up against something so damned ugly I felt like ditching the human race, I've just thought of you."

She stood up. "I wish I meant less to you, Hugh—or that they meant less to you! I wish with all my heart it didn't have to end like this!"

He pulled her against him, holding her with his hands beneath her shoulders. "It is ending?"

"Yes, Hugh."

He suddenly enfolded her and kissed her: then turned and went out of the room. She felt the worst of all agonies; the agony for a thing we love and have hurt. She looked at the great drops streaming from the eaves of the leeward door, and they seemed to her like tears. She thought: "Our story should not end in the darkness of tears." She thought: "I cannot help it."

The sound of the hurricane was now the sound of all the trains in the world crossing the bridge of the sky. The thunder of their passage beat against the deafened ears. Their vibration rocked the ancient earth. Always, sound and vibration were greater than they had been in the preceding moment. Elizabeth saw that the time was five minutes past twelve on the morning of the ninth. She felt surprise that time continued. The barometer was lower and still falling. She knew: "That is one of the lowest readings of the world." She looked down, and a boy with a bloody face crawled out of the white wall of rain. She knelt, and he cried with his lips against her ear: "The houses are down! The people cannot cross the lagoon! Many bleed—"

She said: "I'll call the doctor."

Wind is a battering ram of air; giant arms that wrestle and toss; cruel fingers that wrench the hair to pain against the scalp; twist the eyelashes to pain against the lids. Wind hurts the back of the throat; thrusts knife pains through the bursting ear-chambers. Horizontally flying rain bruises the flesh like hail; tortures the streaming eyeballs. Wind tries to jerk ropes, torches and first aid supplies from the straining hands. Through the white scream of rain is a great feather-storm that is flying foam of the sea. Sound is the shriek of all the whistles on earth united; race of all the trains in the world; volley of all canvas shaken since setting of first sail!

The people crouched under the blast beside the rising lagoon are humped shapes without identity. Touching them, the hand receives a shock in contacting warm, quick-breathing life. A majority of the shapes are those of women, grasping the carefully wrapped cocoons of babies. Figures a yard away may not be seen even in the beam of the torch, but must be felt for through the screaming white. Speech is impossible. Brown hands point softly to horribly bleeding injuries from which the wind snatches away the blood. Clothing catches the wind—and bursts in tatters. Flying sand burns against the flesh as an unseen abrasive; so that the flesh becomes empurpled towards the wind; reddens and oozes blood. The in-driving sea is higher with every heart beat.

With the people at last roped together, Elizabeth put her arm about a girl great with child. The girl's naked and trembling body was velvety to the touch. There was something oddly moving in the great girth of the girl. Elizabeth thought: "If they had left the settlements when they were warned, this would not be happening!" She thought with a sudden rush of pity: "When you have very little, it is not so great a crime to believe you will not be robbed of that little—or beaten to death!" She thought: "I am thinking like Hugh . . ."

They were halfway across the pulling flood when some sullenly riding wreckage of the storm bore down upon them; a slippery and unidentifiable thing; tearing defenceless flesh. The guide rope sang—and parted. The current swept the people back to the shore from which they had come. The girl's body hung heavy and inert; the soft throat gashed open. Elizabeth thought: "The damned place has killed her!" She thought: "It may have killed Hugh!"

Her fingers struggled with the knot of the rope about her waist; but her fingers could not undo the wet rope. Her mind became Hugh's body. She pictured his body turning over in the foam; his strong hands limp amongst the masses of seaweed. She thought: "I could go to places where he was, and he would not be there. I could look endlessly through the world, and he could not be found. He would not *be!*"

She cowered helplessly in spray that seemed the blast of a fire hose. Pain tortured her bent face, but her mind seemed to her amongst the stars in a terrible clearness. She thought of Hugh: "I wanted a great man. He is a great man. But—after a little while—I wanted a great man and a normal life—and the two don't go together." She knew: "I have been infinitely cruel . . . *I wanted a great man—and a sure winner. And a great man can never be sure of winning!*"

She thought: "In the vast uncertainty between birth and death, what is there that is certain except human love? We don't know 'why we came or where we are going.' Except for love, it is too horrible to look at! With love, it is a brave journey—if it is from nothing to destruction. Braver—and more beautiful—because we don't know if it is from nothing to destruction!" She thought: "I have love—if I have not broken it. Let me know again that I have it, and I will be unafraid. Of pain—or death—or life. Even of this place." Her mind became a cry to Hugh: "Love me! Be with me! No other need matters to this. Love me, Hugh—and I could live even if you should die."

She raised her face that was hot with tears. She thought: "Hugh thinks I have intelligence and courage. Somehow, I must get them across!" A hand grasped her shoulder, and Hugh's voice shouted against her ear: "Elizabeth?" Her own voice was helpless against mounting wind and sound. She clung to her husband; trying to express in the wordlessness of kissing, all the unimportance of anything, in past or future, beside her love for him and the simple gladness that he lived. "I am very rich—you are to be found!" She wished: "Let us live until I can tell him this!"

This time they succeeded in crossing; to meet such a blast as the storm had not yet loosed upon them. With it came a strange increase in light; as if rain and spray were dissolved by velocity and became luminous.

Where had been jungle, stumps smoked like decayed teeth in the spindrift. The island was disintegrating under the wind that blew the soil from the rocks and loosened the rocks from the soil. The people climbed through the fusillade of disintegration. They staggered, fell, rose again; moving desperately, against great odds, through great pain. They moved with a strange dignity; still protectively. They were half-naked—and hunched in a common purpose of love.

The stronger shapes of youth supported the brittle shapes of age. Women bent protectively over the round bundles of babies; small children clung to dead or dying pets. It was as though the last thing of man to be destroyed was love.

Through the silver unreality, the people reach the little plateau of the hospital compound. The buildings are gone. The plateau smokes before the people in the spindrift as if under a writhing veil of gauze. Suddenly, the spindrift smokes upward; the wind is shut away. The people stare with horrified eyes towards the sea; whence some great thing comes at them out of the night.

Elizabeth, too, stared towards the sea. A strange dark sky

seemed to hang there; patterned in white. She experienced a swaying of the ground beneath her; as if the island rocked on its stem under the impact of intolerable weight. Hugh's body hit her; pinning her to the ground beneath his body. She felt him twisting his arms under the hardwood roots—and they were under water. As the wave passed, the sea was all about them. Above catastrophe, the wind was still shut off. Elizabeth felt Hugh lifting her. Coughing, he shouted: "Up! . . . There . . . will be . . . a greater crest!" Imagination could not credit such a crest.

As the people gained the cave mouth, the island swayed again; the vast and vertical curtain of water that is the crest of a mountain of water, crashed against the cave mouth; and dashed back as dragging cataracts. The wind was still shut off. The people checked before the cave in sudden fear of the trap. But above them was only the small, bald crown of the island from which they would be swept as leaves from a roof. It was better to die together in the cave.

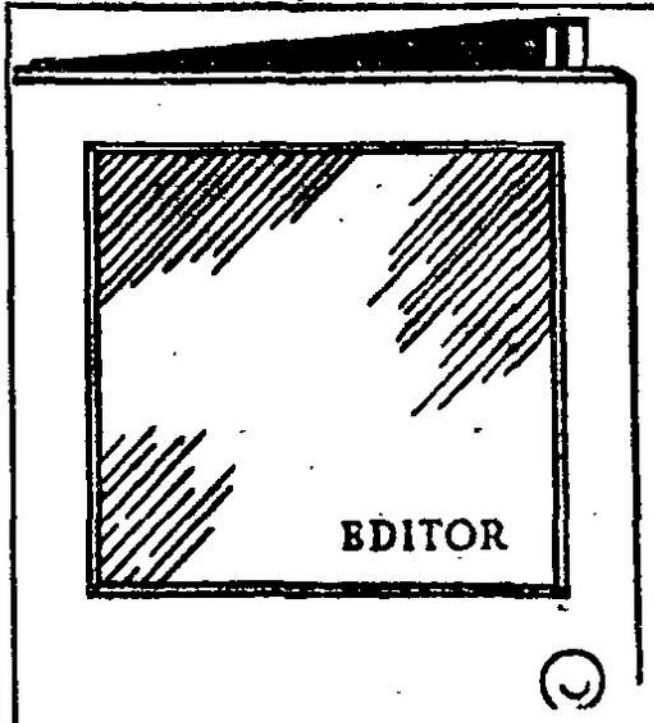
The third storm-crest struck the island. The island struggled under the impact of a million tons. Rocks splintered from the cave roof. Water boiled breast deep in the cave and foam splashed the cave roof. Then wind and sound were back; such wind as perhaps had not blown before against the face of the world. In flying foam and ricochet of wind, they did what could be done for the wounded and the dying. Hours became sound and the drowning flight of spray . . . Then salt spray and wind were less. Beside Elizabeth, Hugh stirred from his pose of exhaustion; took a cigarette and matches from their waterproof case.

She said: "Hugh?" and found that she could hear her voice. He turned his battered face to her, lit by the glow of the match. She said: "I was wrong. Hugh, I love you. To be with you—to love you—is all that really matters to me. I may not like the places where you are, but where you are is the only place there is for me! Only love me, Hugh! Just let's keep the knowing we're *for* each other—loving so that we know! I'd grown blind, but I won't grow blind again. Tell me you know that! That while it's you and I, nothing else matters! I've only wanted to live to have back the sureness between us, Hugh—the great river of strength—the warm fire!"

He said: "There is such a thing as the blindness of shock—so that just now sacrifice doesn't seem like sacrifice."

"It's not that, Hugh! I love you—"

He said: "I know that you love me. You loved me when we talked tonight. But you knew then that you could pay too big a price for it. The set-up's still the same—if you stay here—only a darn sight grimmer!"



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"It's not sacrifice. It's to be rich—to thank you always for letting me be with you and for loving me! I thought you were dead, Hugh—and it was as if there was no world! Then you came back, but I thought you might die thinking I wished to leave you. I couldn't bear the moments while I couldn't tell you! Oh, Hugh, be happy knowing I love you!"

"I know—that you are a very generous creature." Looking before him, he drew on his cigarette. "Have you thought that I thought you were dead? That for the first time I realized what I'd been asking of you? I thought you were dead—and that you'd had just about nothing that makes a woman's life. You never see a white woman. Almost never a white man. I've seen you reading reviews of plays and films—where even radio's mostly static!" He drew on the cigarette. "I tried to think that if we lived through this I'd take you away. I wanted to, Elizabeth—but I still knew I couldn't."

She said: "I don't want you to. I don't want you to go back on the thing in yourself that keeps you here. I don't even wish it wasn't there. For if it wasn't, you'd be different."

"When I knew I couldn't, I knew another thing. You are going away. You are going to divorce me."

"I am not going. I love you."

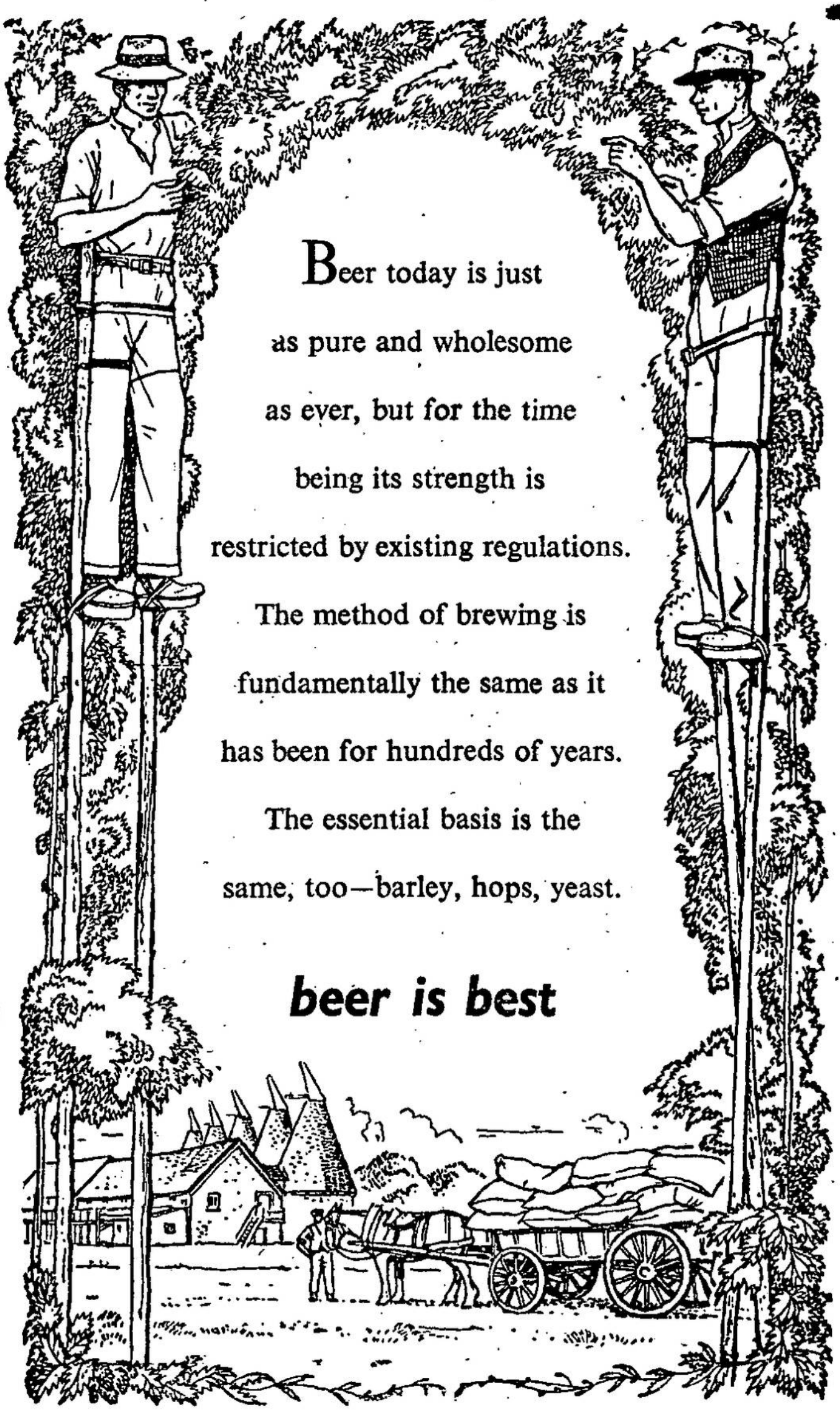
"There would have to be a better reason than that. And there isn't any other reason."

She said: "A better reason than loving you? That's going to be hard to think of—but if I have to, I will!"

"It would have to be a better reason than there is, my dear. Don't try to find it, Elizabeth! I am very tired."

With a great sigh the wind sank away, moaning with a sound that came from all the edges of the sea. They were in the calm that is the centre of the storm. The people looked from the cave—and beheld a wonder. Great stars, diamond bright and flecked with colour, filled the sky. To the east was a vast rosiness of dawn. From the stars and the dawn fell a soft, feathered rain; faintly moaning, softly fluttering; thousands past counting of birds, sinking to die upon the island! Bright swallows, gulls, doves and sparrows; endless birds; many folding their wings in death before they reached the ground; others alighting on the rocks, on the heads or the outstretched hands of the people—only to close their eyes in sleep that became death. It was a terrible and a beautiful and a miraculous thing to see. The people knelt, whispering and astounded.

Ships in the same storm told later of the same strangeness. Men reasoned that for all the days of its growth, the storm had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blown the birds towards its centre. Men replied that the birds would have fallen to their death on the first night. At the end, men knew only that the birds were there, in a great, soft snow of wings and a feathered rain and that the sound of them and their incredible numbers filled all the cavern of the storm.

Report from the Principal Meteorologist, Weather Bureau: "*. . . We have no meteorological record of the storm at Santa Cruz del Sur, because the rise of the sea carried everything before it . . . Twenty-five hundred lives were lost . . .*"

For the hurricane and its terrible tide has struck the coast of Cuba. A beautiful and ancient city lies as a field of rubble "trampled by the cattle." Without loss of force, the storm has crossed Cuba and burst again into the Atlantic. Its re-emergence into the Atlantic is the moment for which the men of weather have been waiting. If it bears to seaward, it will pass into the history of storms. If it turns against the Atlantic seaboard, it will pass into the history of mankind's disaster . . . It rolls across the Bahamas—and to sea.

The turtle fleet of Great Three, having gained their canning port on the Atlantic coast of Cuba, have been swept like spray from the port and driven seaward like logs in the sea; afloat only because they are as unsinkable as logs.

On the fourth day, the Red Cross reached the island; led by a large ugly woman who descended the gangway carrying an armload of tinned milk. Elizabeth said: "Thank God! I can stop watching babies starving and wondering why! If you could have made it yesterday, there would have been more of them to be pleased."

The large woman sighed. "Don't think we didn't try! We'll do better when we have 'planes. *If* we have 'planes! People are always being disillusioned by finding we're human; annoys 'em so much they stop contributing."

Her beautiful laugh shook the tinned milk. A vast and maternal pity touched her beautiful eyes. "Rub something on your skin and your husband's and lie down—before we have the bother of burying you!"

Above the wrecked island the stars were coming out as Elizabeth woke from the thirty hours of sleep. She looked up at them—near stars and far stars; silver beyond silver. She thought: "They will be the same a million years from now." About the island, the sparks of the camp fires rose from the embracing blue; restless and more fragile than the stars.

A kind of terrible sadness was in her, but it was a sweet sadness —for it was not for herself. She was sad for the people, bereaved,

impoverished, facing long hunger; yet helping each other. For Hugh, whom she had hurt.

In the weariness of physical exhaustion, she looked at him asleep beside her. Looking at him, she loved him. But it was more than this. She thought: "I must understand it, so that he can know how much I know it."

It was not only that she had thought him dead and known agony . . . Through the background of her new strength, the people climbed the Bluff through the hurricane. They moved, loving, against forces greater than themselves; beyond their knowing. They were in a manner unconquerable. In the face of death, they loved; in the face of the infinite unknown.

She thought: "I was proud to be on a journey with them. I loved them." She was startled by the thought that fully to love one man, one must a little love all men. She thought: "Perhaps that is why he loves me so much? Because he is tender to all women?" She touched her husband with her hand. The result of the journey no longer seemed to her of such moment; its direction was what mattered. One needed only to be proud of the direction of the journey. She thought, smiling: "There is a third thing. The fat woman told me of it . . . Let me tell it right to Hugh!"

A small fire had been lighted for them in the twilight; beside it, a pot of fish and potatoes stood, and a pot of coffee, thick and sweet with condensed milk. Suddenly, Elizabeth was ravenous. She said: "Wake, Hugh! We feast!"

They ate as if they had never seen food before; drank the coffee; incredulous that there could be such a thing as coffee to drink. They lit cigarettes and drew on them unbelievingly, as if there could not be cigarettes in the world . . . Sitting with their backs against the rock, by the fire under the stars, she put out her hand and pressed it over his against the sand. She said: "I'm not going away."

His large hand moved under hers, but he continued to look at the fire; stirring it a little with a stick in his other hand.

He said slowly: "I don't want your life to be served up as a burnt offering—to something that may not be worth while—or to me!"

He touched the fire so that great gold sparks rose up against the blue air and the close and brilliant stars. He said deliberately: "A thing like this—a hurricane or an earthquake—anything that means you may be dead next minute—throws things out of focus. I know you love me—and the thought that anyone you love may be dead—or is likely to die—is a bad jolt. For the minute, it seems nothing matters—and anything is worth while. But it isn't enough

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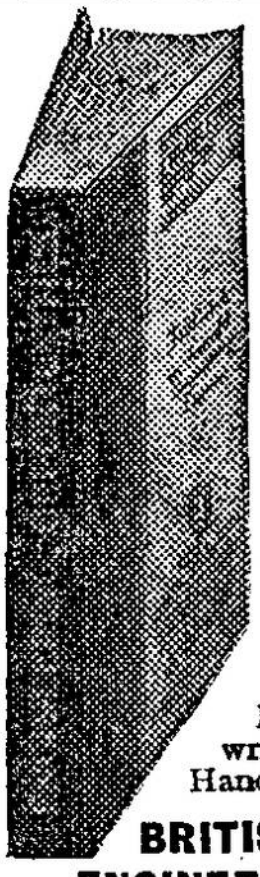

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BIET

to build a life on. A life takes a terribly long time to live . . ."

She said: "I know that. That's why I didn't tell you this again while I thought we might die. I wanted to—but I knew you wouldn't believe me. And I had to be sure myself. I know there's a blindness of shock—like a flash of lightning when you can't see ordinary things. But there's another sort of blindness, too. Like the blindness of dust. You don't notice it happening—as you don't notice dust settling—but it's more dangerous than any shock. Under it, you can lose sight of love and kindness and humour and everything you really want . . . I did. I lost sight of how tremendously I loved you—that being with you and near you is worth more than anything else in the world. Yet that's true for me. Look at me, Hugh!"

He said, studying the fire: "As I told you before, you are a very generous creature. On sober reflection, I don't see anything in myself to fill a world."

Releasing his hand, she twisted so that she lay across his knees, looking up into his face. "It isn't easy to explain—and I did a rather thorough job of saying the opposite. It's more than you! If you understand that. If you had been killed I'd have stayed here. They wouldn't have needed me as they need you—but they'd have needed me. I'd have thought what you think. I wouldn't have stayed to be a burnt offering or a sacrifice. I don't believe in sacrifice. I'd have stayed because they needed me—and to be really needed is the biggest thing you can be given. I'm not fooling myself. It isn't going to be milk and roses. They aren't going to be different—they may be less obstinate about the next hurricane—but they'll make up for it by being worse about something else. They'll be conceited and obstinate and exasperating—and human. But I won't be so disillusioned that I'll stop contributing . . . The dust won't get in my eyes again. There is a glory to set against ugliness. I won't forget that. I won't forget to laugh again."

She sat up and took his cigarette away from him and took his face between her hands. "I love you—very much! I wouldn't want you—I couldn't bear you—different! Not in any way." She put her cheek against his tired cheek and pressed their faces together. "You don't quite believe me yet. But you're going to!"

He put his arms round her and drew her back so that her head lay against his shoulder and throat. "Am I?"

She pressed into his arms. "Just go on wanting me, Hugh!"

"That's very easy. I want you rather more than a man wants air!" he said.

"But you still don't quite believe me? . . . How I love you? How I want to stay with you?"

" I'm not a very vain man . . . I've given you—only hardship. I might believe more easily if I didn't want to believe quite so much—"

" You have given me—' a great measure ! ' To be with you. To help you. I won't go blind again. You will believe me. Here's your cigarette back. Give me one ! " The smoke of the cigarettes was grey against the gold of the fire, pale on the blue of the crisp and infinite night.

He closed his hand over hers again. They rested in infinite weariness and infinite closeness. She said : " You have never—been lost, Hugh ! It is as if I had been lost—and had come back into the world again. I tried to love you by yourself. To be happy by ourselves. You can't do it, Hugh ! You can't say ' Here's my happiness. The rest of the world doesn't matter.' If you do it, your own happiness suddenly isn't enough. You can't say ' I love one person—and don't care about the rest.' For somehow you can only love one person enough if you care about the rest. You have to care about everyone for one person—and one person for everyone . . . *You* know it—automatically—"

He said with amusement : " Do I ? I was unaware of it. It was my impression I dosed old men and delivered babies and conducted very unsuccessful experiments with mixed bugs."

" Some people know it so well they don't have to think it. I have to find my way to thinking it. You've known all children were our children. Our happiness, all happiness. I didn't—or I forgot . . . I think you come at it by a sort of—universal kindness, that also makes you love me. For me, it works the other way. If I am looking after coloured children, in a way I'll be looking after you. That makes them worth looking after to me—letting me love you more . . . . It's the same thing. Oneness. All courage, one courage. All love, one love. Oh, I know it's very old ! Buddha said it—and Christ. But we can't live without it—I tried ! While we know it, we can't be hurt—really—we're too strong ; too much loved. Nothing on earth matters beside it, Hugh ! . . . I sound a little drunk ; but it's with the happiness of getting back into the world and to you, Hugh ! I hope the experiments succeed. For my thought of you, it doesn't matter. What matters is that you have to make them."

" That perhaps is as well . . . nothing may come of them."

" It's only for you and for other people who'd be helped that it matters. It doesn't matter to me—except for you and other people. What matters is that you're as you are. I'm very content with you, Hugh."

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merged with an extensive disturbance that has passed . . . over Newfoundland . . ."

For the giant is dying; blowing into the history of weather; out of the lives of men . . .

And the turtle ships of Great Three, lying mastless and sodden in the seas, are nearer to the misty coast of Newfoundland than to Three Islands in the Caribbean. The coastguards of the nations would aid them; but the captains are simple men and do not know this. So the turtle ships turn soddenly south under jury masts; to crawl across the temperate zones of the world—across the sub-tropics—across the tropic line—towards the blue light of the Caribbean . . .

They keep secretly far to sea; for the fear of the salvagers is on them. The food runs low—and the captains ration the food. The food gives out—and the crews catch fish—and the crews and the captains grow thin—and the days come up and go down and the ships crawl. But the days grow bluer and the sun more blazing bright. And the captains say: "Soon we see the Southern Cross!" They do not know if they come home only to death . . . At noon on the fortieth day from the passing of the hurricane, they see Great Three; the men from the ships and the people of the island

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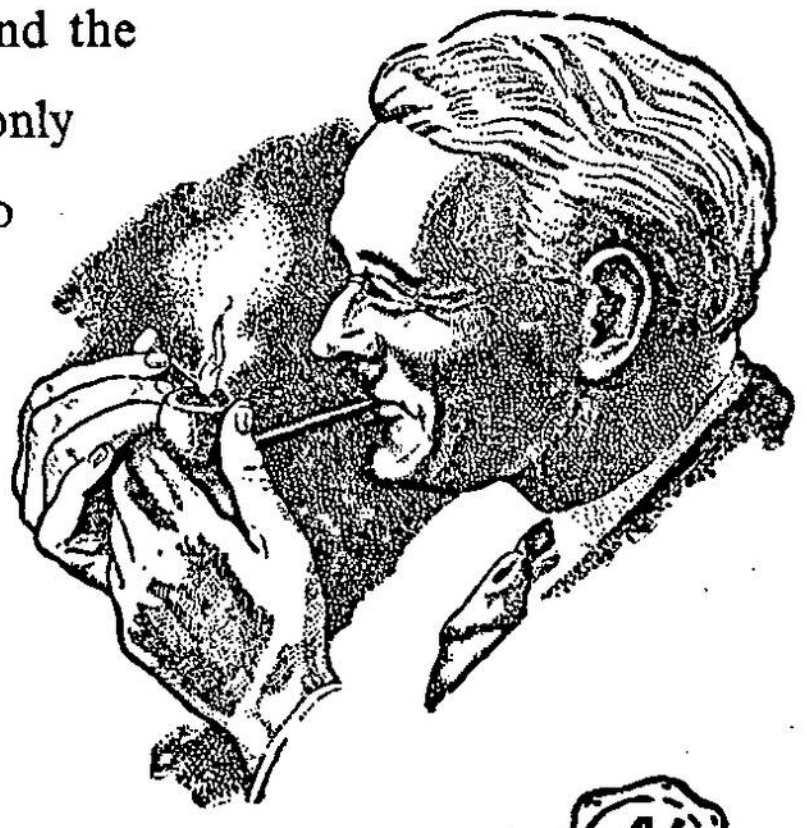

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run towards each other, "meeting as two waves meet—and the spray, their tears."

The women and the men say each other's names. "Angel!" "Justine! . . . All is well?" "All is *very* well! Soon we will be married!"

Martin, the young second mate, is afraid. "'Vangeline is—absent?" "'Vangeline nurses those on Three Rock. She was saved, for she was with the children in the cave . . ."

On the third morning after the return of the fleet, the captains, wearing their best blue serge suits, presented themselves as a deputation before the hospital tent on Three Rock. They were big men, and grave brown men that are not quite like any others. The Senior Captain stepped forward.

"Good Doctor," he said, "we have here a gift for you that is the wish of all the people. I have here the lockets and the rings of the women—which have been theirs from very long ago. Also this further gift—which is in a manner the gift of my young son, Abraham, who left us the thought, and who with Jacob, my Mate, alone in the fleet died of the storm." He held out the great gold watches that are the pride of the captains of the turtle fleets and are worth fifty pounds sterling in any port in the world. "We wish you to have them and sell them, making use of the money as you think best. This chest is also the gift of my son, who was a foolish small boy and believed it of value. He spent much time in the collection of its nonsense that he might give it you."

The captains went away in their best suits. Elizabeth, looking at Hugh, asked: "Now do you understand?"

"Yes," he said, holding the trove of watches and the little chest. He put his arm about her and they went back to the hospital tent.

* * *

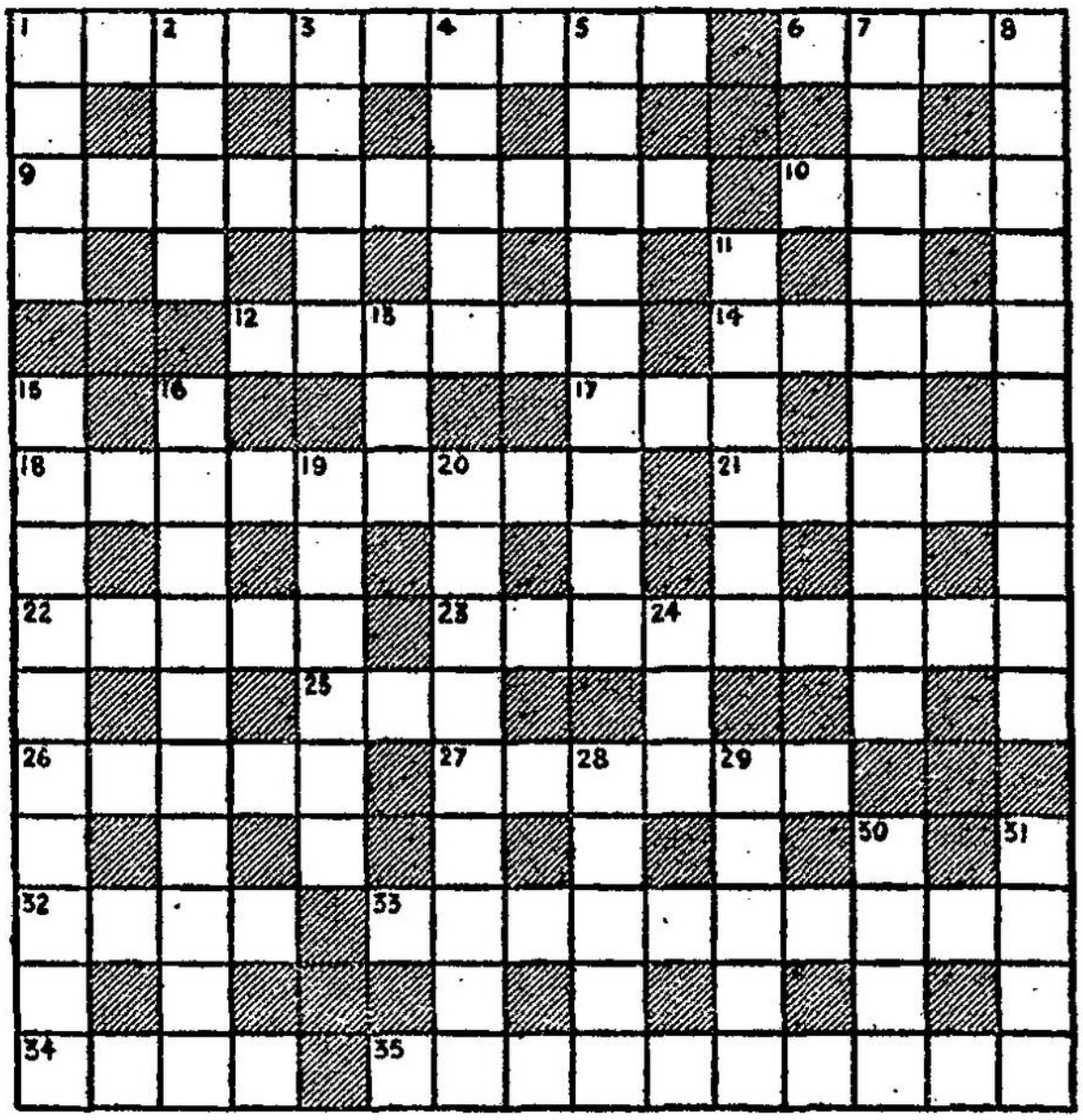
SOLUTION to ARGOSY CROSSWORD on page 160

Across. 1, Night shift. 6, Open. 9, Draw it mild. 10, Haig. 12, Flense. 14, Islet. 17, Hip. 18, Obbligato. 21, Thigh. 22, Natal. 23, Bedspread. 25, Emu. 26, Least. 27, Secure. 32, Watt. 33, Tablecloth. 34, Rude. 35, Secondbest.

Down. 1, Nods. 2, Goat. 3, Twill. 4, Human. 5, Falsehood. 7, Pearl-diver. 8, Nightshade. 11, Tiptop. 13, Egg. 15, Cornflower. 16, Abstracted. 19, Inlets. 20, Ambuscade. 24, Sou. 28, 'Cello. 29, Raced. 30, Hose. 31, Whit.

ARGOSY CROSS WORD

Solution on page 159



CLUES

Across

1 Those working then do not wear the appropriate garment (5, 5).

6 See Sam a little muddled was given this order (4).

9 Instruction to the barmaid not to exaggerate (4, 2, 4).

10 British soldier in spirit (4).

12 Cut up (a whale) (6).

14 Small piece of land obviously tenanted (5).

17 A flexible joint in Hawaii (3).

18 A necessity of musical accompaniment (9).

21 Just below 17 across (5).

22 This place of birth was discovered in 1497 (5).

23 Hurried in confusion in bread to make a covering (9).

25 Relative of cassowary (3).

26 It couldn't be any less (5).

27 Reliable but see about the beast (6).

32 He didn't quite envisage a Flying Scotsman (4).

33 The cab toll would pay for this perhaps? (10).

34 "The — forefathers of the hamlet sleep" (Gray) (4).

35 Not good enough for many people (10).

Down

1 "Haste thee nymph, and bring with thee . . . —and becks and wreathed smiles" (L'Allegro) (4).

2 Zodiacal sign born apparently in January (4).

3 Fabric with a surface of parallel ridges (5).

4 Adam was but this, said Mark Twain (5).

5 It is not true: it is not a sham fitting on the body of the car (9).

7 His work goes on whether there is a R in the month or not (5-5).

8 Poisonous, but only in the evening it seems? (10).

11 Perfect, the edge and the summit (6).

13 Scarce in clutches these days (3).

15 Does it flow into a corner in the garden? (10).

16 Painfully pensive perhaps because I bet at cards? (10).

19 Pieces inserted? (6).

20 Apparently there is one vehicle caught in this trap (9).

24 Obsolete valueless piece of copper (3).

28 A bow is necessary when nothing is added to the prisoner's room (5).

29 Found perhaps in the scented timber a cedar tree produces (5).

30 Flexible tube, tangled up in 5 down (4).

31 This particle beheaded can be quite hard (4).

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